



DOS 6: Do Gamers *Really* Need It?

GAME PLAYERS

PC

Entertainment™

Coktel Vision

Leads A French Gaming Invasion

INTERFA

45
New
Games
Inside!

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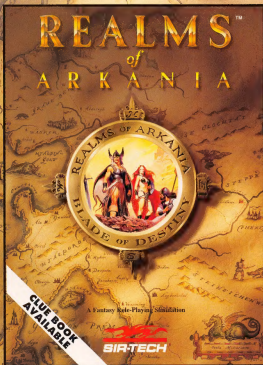
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EDITOR'S NOTES

If you've been keeping up with the latest trends in entertainment software, you've probably heard one word over and over: multimedia. Now it seems that the multimedia explosion has moved into PC games as well. But there's still one unanswered question: Just what the heck does "multimedia" mean, anyway?

My trusty *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines it as "the combined use of several media." A strong argument can be made that computer animation is just as much a media as video footage, and if that's the case then we've been playing multimedia games for some time now.

But many would argue that if a game is to earn the multimedia moniker, it has to incorporate digitized video. And while we've seen several good games over the past couple of years that did just that, very few have done it seamlessly. All too often, the video stole the show from actual game play.

That's changed with the release of *Inca*, from French developer Koktel Vision. We extensively played a preview copy of the CD-ROM version of this graphic adventure/puzzle game, and were uniformly impressed with the way video footage was used, subtly but effectively, throughout the game. The soundtrack on the CD-ROM version is stunning, one of the richest we've ever heard, and adds tension during arcade sequences and a sense of wonder during cinematic cutaways.

Inca isn't perfect. Veteran gamers may feel that winning is too easy, or that the wacky plot — with such unexplained anomalies as Spanish Galleons in space — is a bit too much to take. But we see it as one of the best examples of how developers can incorporate the latest in technology without sacrificing the very things that make PC games appealing: the way they challenge our intellect and appeal to our emotions.

Stephen Poole
Editor

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GAME HARDWARE AND UTILITIES

Intensive gaming has given you a case of the dreaded "numb thumb," Triax Technologies may have the cure. The Turbo Touch 360 controller pad claims to bring the same touch-sensitive control to PCs that it originally brought to console gaming. The unit features a standard four-button configuration and turbo control, and is now available through Triax for \$29.95.

PC users bored with their home exercise equipment may find inspiration with a new product from **Computer Athlete**. The "Exercitement" program simulates exercise environments on your monitor (snowy ski paths, open waters to row, scenic paths on which to run or cycle). A photo-electric eye matches the movement of the on-screen character with your own. Computer Athlete retails for \$159.95. For more info and to order call 1-800-860-4506.

Cardinal Technologies is encouraging PC users to up-

grade their audio...for less. The company's new Digital Sound Pro 16 Series offers true 16-bit digital audio, with the base model listed at \$159.00. The Digital Sound Pro uses a reprogrammable digital signal processor (DSP) chipset, and a wavetable MIDI music synthesis upgrade kit will be available in August for under \$100. The Digital Sound Pro 16 Plus, with an on-board SCSI CD-ROM interface, lists for \$229.

C & D Programming Corporation has introduced **CacheAll**, a caching utility capable of caching any type of storage device either locally or over a network. Debuting with an introductory price of \$79 (\$129 after July 31), **CacheAll** supports cache sizes up to 64 megabytes (using EMS, XMS, or a swap file) and runs under Windows. According to C & D, **CacheAll** is the first cache that can speed up file access as much as 1000 percent.

ony Electronic Publishing has acquired Liverpool-based computer and video-game publisher **Psynopsis**. **Psynopsis**, creators of *Lemmings* 1 and 2, will continue to market and distribute computer games under the **Psynopsis** label, as well as develop software for Sony's video-game division, Sony Imagesoft.

What does a PC game company do when it wants to enter the cartridge market in a big way? Simple — it buys a cartridge game company. That's exactly what happened when **Spectrum HoloByte** recently took control of **Bullet-Proof Software**. Each developer has credentials galore: **Bullet-Proof** brought *Tetris* to Nintendo platforms, as well as *FaceBall 2000* and the upcoming *Yoshi's Cookie*, while **Spectrum** is best known for PC versions of *Tetris* and the megahit air-combat sim *Falcon 3.0*.

Hi Tech's in the news again, this time joining the list of software developers receiving investment capital. The company recently secured \$5.8 million

from a consortium of major venture capital firms. **Hi Tech** will use the money to expand its product line and acquire additional licenses.

Sesame Street goes interactive: **Electronic Arts** has signed an exclusive development agreement with **The Children's Television Workshop**. The two giants will come together to produce interactive media through EA's new EA*KIDS division. The long-term partnership is planned to encompass a variety of platforms. The *Sesame Street* line will star well-known characters from the show.

Gametek is best known as a software developer, but is now making major moves as a distributor for other game publishers. Leading the list of companies whose software **Gametek** will distribute is **Konami** (which has just signed its distribution agreement with **Gametek**), **Spirit of Discovery**, and **Gremlin Graphics, Ltd.** **Gametek** will also distribute software for five other companies.

NEW AND UPCOMING RELEASES

eadySoft is putting the final touches on *King's Ransom*, a fantasy adventure slated for September release. As the king's agent of goodness, your job is to find and destroy a number of powerful crystals buried within a mountain range. The crystals contain pure, concentrated evil, and all hell will break loose if you fail.

Three-Sixty's *High Command*, once sold out of a basement, will soon be coming to store shelves. The WWII strategy game, which focuses on resource management and strategic planning, was originally designed by two programming buddies who pitched their creation to Three-Sixty. The software developer has polished *High Command*, giving it Super VGA graphics and an improved interface.

Hi Tech Expressions is reintroducing some familiar characters through new PC titles: Animated superstars *Tom & Jerry* appear in a game based on the upcoming T & J movie; the eternally popular *Barbie* gets dolled-up for *Barbie Super Model*; and *Beethoven* (the movie dog) enjoys a romp based on his film adventures. Additionally, **Hi Tech** is introducing two design and print programs, *Improve! Printpower Pro* and *Paintpower Pro*.

Nick Price's *Troubleshooting Golf* lets you clinic with one of the game's reigning talents. The

three-volume software series was developed in Australia by **Intermark**. The focus is on isolating trouble spots through interactive text and correcting video clips. The first volume, *The Short Game*, retails for \$49.95.



King's Ransom



High Command

might remind you of a certain summer blockbuster movie. In *DinoPark Tycoon* (\$59.95), kids learn the ropes of running a business by managing a dinosaur park. Players start from the ground up, buying real estate, hiring park workers, and setting up concession stands. The game will be available by late summer, and can be ordered directly from **MECC** (800-685-6322, ext. 549).

Raya Systems, Inc. is using a PC game to help fight the ignorance and fear surrounding the

MECC's new *DinoPark Tycoon* is like no other PC educational game around, although it

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Screen-shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game. Game program © 1987 Ocean Software Limited.

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HIV virus. *Raya's* superhero, *The AIDS Avenger*, corrects misunderstandings about AIDS and HIV and educates one town's citizens about HIV prevention. A portion of the game's sales will be donated to AmFAR (the American Foundation for AIDS Research). *The AIDS Avenger*, which retails for \$39.95, is the second in *Raya's "Health Hero"* series. Order directly from *Raya Systems* at 1-800-874-1993.

Prospective parents can now turn to their PC for helpful instruction about pregnancy and childbirth. **Software Marketing**



Nick Price's Troubleshooting Golf

Corporation has developed B.A.B.Y. — *Birth and Baby Years*, which stores information as well as presenting it: Parents can enter and save pediatric data about their child, while learning about the birth cycle, week by week.

ON THE BOARDS

he Sierra Network is joining forces with another interactive giant, the NTN Entertainment Network. NTN is already established nationally, with over 850 bars, restaurants, and hotel lounges receiving their interactive football and trivia games. Now TSN subscribers will have access to NTN programming.

TSN users will also be able to enjoy another popular medium — talk radio. "Dvorak on Computers," a radio program hosted by the famous computer guru, will be carried on TSN, allowing subscribers to call in questions to the show's hosts.

And if you don't have a modem or a TSN membership, you should check out the *TSN Game Modem*. This bundled package includes Best Data Products' 2400 bps internal modem, TSN multi-player game software, and a TSN Membership Kit with three free hours of evening/week-end access and a \$30 credit toward membership and usage. The *TSN Game Modem* will be sold nationwide through mass merchandisers and computer and software retailers.

Beginning July 1, GENIE will drop its non-prime time connect charge rate to \$3 an hour. The monthly subscription fee of \$8.95 gives GENIE members credit for four hours of non-prime time usage, so the \$3/hour rate will kick in once that is used up. The new rate will be welcomed by fans of GENIE's online multi-player games, some of which are *Air Warrior*, an air-combat simulator with planes from WWI, WWII, and the Korean War; *Cyberstrike*, a futuristic combat game in which players control robotic vehicles; *Dragon's Gate*, a fantasy role-playing game; and *MultiPlayer BattleTech*, based on the popular FASA *BattleTech* board game.

If you use *MicroLeague Interactive's Fantasy Manager* to handle your rotisserie baseball league stats, you probably already know that the *USA Today Information Center* is no longer providing support for the program. The new source for stat updates is *Computer Sports World of Boulder City, Nevada*. For more details contact *MicroLeague* at (800) 334-6572, or *Computer Sports World* at (800) 321-5562.

UPDATE

ADD-ONS AND EXPANSION DISKS

any LaRissa Baseball II is turning out to be the new hands-down favorite of computer baseball fans, and the arrival of the first of three scheduled add-on disks makes a superb program even better. *AL/NL Stadiums* is one of the best executed sports add-ons we've seen in a while.

The stadium graphics are fantastic, and a menu option to just look around the stands, panning in all directions and admiring the scenery, is a welcome touch. The Houston Astrodome, the new Yankees Stadium, Riverfront Stadium, the Skydome, Arlington Stadium, and 23 others are all modeled very accurately.

Sim buffs have mixed feelings about *NovaLogic's Comanche: Maximum Overkill*; some think it's the best air-combat sim of all time, while others say it's pretty to look at but highly unrealistic (I'm in the latter camp). One thing everyone agreed upon, though, was the paucity of missions included with the game. *Comanche: Mission Disk 1* aims to remedy that problem with three "campaigns" of ten missions each.

The three campaigns aren't linked thematically, and feature no progression from mission to mission. Some opponents (a South American drug lord, for example) appear in several scenarios, but none of the new missions forms a unified campaign

against a single opponent. New terrains include arctic landscapes and deserts, which are both incredibly detailed. Three new threats (SCUD launcher, Soviet BRDM-3 armored vehicle, and the

MI-24 Hind helicopter) are included for variety, but if you were one of the many who breezed through the missions that came with



Great Naval Battles of the North Atlantic Scenario Builder



Imperial Pursuit

Comanche, you'll agree that *Mission Disk 1* doesn't inject any challenge into this turkey shoot. Maybe *Mission Disk 2* will remedy this.

Great Naval Battles of the North Atlantic Scenario Builder is the third and final addition to this popular naval wargame. A Career option makes this much more than just a scenario builder and editor; it adds an entirely new aspect to this excellent naval sim.

The *Scenario Builder* itself is outstanding, allowing you to use any ships found in the main game or the two other scenario disks. Heading, speed, damage, formation, weather, and all other factors can be controlled as you pit any combination of ships against each other anywhere in the Atlantic. Existing scenarios

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can be edited as well.

A new .EXE file changes the configuration of the main menu, allowing you to play a constructed scenario or begin and continue a career in either the British or German navy. The Career option starts you off in command of a single ship (usually small) and offers randomly-generated combat, with promotion "points" and medals awarded for outstanding performance. You can work your way from captain to Admiral of the Fleet or Crossadmiral, see him win a Victoria Cross, Knights Cross, or any number of other medals, or watch him suffer humiliating defeat and lose his commission. If you enjoy GNBNA, this is a must add-on.

Just as they did with the original *Links*, Access is keeping busy pumping out some of the most attractive golf courses on computer for the award-winning *Links 386 Pro*. *Banff Springs* in Alberta, Canada is the latest and most beautiful. Set high in the Canadian Rockies, these 18 holes meander beside the Bow River and twist along the base of three mountains. For the first few holes, Banff seems rather

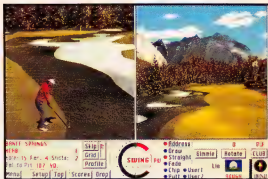


MiG-29: Deadly Adversary

simple, with fairly straight fairways and few hazards, and tricky shots over water at holes 4 and 8 seem like the only spikes on an otherwise placid course. But at hole 9 a fancy dogleg hints at things to come, and by the heavily bunkered 11th Banff has turned into a monster! It ends up with some gorgeous, fiendishly tricky holes, making it the best computer golf course yet.

Access projects four more course disks for *Links 386 Pro* by the end of the year: Belfry, England (June) and Innisbrook, Florida (August), with Kapalua in Maui and the Tex Murphy Fantasy Course possibly by this fall.

Opinions may be varied about *Strike Commander* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), but you can be sure we'll be



Banff Springs

hearing about it for a long time.

Origin has already released a *Speech Pack*, and two secret mission disks are due very soon. Though it offers no additional narration for the cinematic scenes, the *Speech Pack* adds digitized speech and in-flight sound effects while you're in the cockpit, and the info it provides can save your tail in a dogfight. By the way, the *Speech Pack* takes up seven megs—but if you've made enough room for the 40-plus megs of *Strike Commander*, you'll probably want to

make room for this add-on.

As of now, **LucasArts** has two Tour of Duty disks planned for *X-Wing: Imperial Pursuit*, which features a new fighter (the B-Wing), is due out in May, while the untitled follow-up should hit shelves by late summer.

Spectrum Holobyte has announced an intriguing add-on disk for *Falcon 3.0*. *MiG-29: Deadly Adversary* will not only introduce the classic Soviet air-superiority fighter as an opponent to the F-16, but will also put flight hacks in the cockpit of the MiG-29.

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BUG PATCHES AND UPGRADES

Bethesda Softworks has added a new campaign for *Terminator 2029*, featuring 12 new missions. In *Operation Scour*, the destruction of Skynet has activated a "Plan B," unleashing new weapons like the Manta and a hovering hunter-killer called the Guardian. Some new intelligence is controlling all this chaos, so you've been assigned to the Washington D.C. area to clean up and eliminate it. You begin *Scour* as a lieutenant colonel, with a full array of weapons and a new and improved ACE suit — but it's not so new and improved, however, that it will keep you from getting your clock cleaned every other second. This campaign disk does nothing to spare gamers the interminable repair sessions that were the hallmark of the original game, nor does it alter the awkward interface or contain important sound board info. As a series of missions, *Scour* adds a bit of variety, but is mostly more of what you faced in the original T2029.

ere's a quick rundown of the games for which patch disks have been released, and what the patches correct. If you own any of these products, give the publisher a call to find out how to receive a copy.

- *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* has two patches: one to fix slow-downs and crashes, and the other for DR-DOS conflicts.
- *Darklands* version .07 is finally here. This latest in a long line of patches allegedly fixes hundreds of small problems related to game logic, art, memory conflicts, crashes, and more. Games can now be saved while on the battlefield, but old saved games may still have bugs in them. The new version also requires more EMS, and to install this patch you need version .05 or later; if you don't, you have to update to patch .06, then .07. Isn't that simple?

- *Dune II* repairs the delivery of products bought through CHOAM for owners of version 1.0.
- *Earl Weaver Baseball 2.0* fixes keyboard and loading lockups in Tandy computers.
- *Indy 500* now supports Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards on 386 and 486 computers. You can download the patch, which alters the INDY.EXE file, by logging onto the Papyrus Design Group bulletin board at 617-576-7472 (9600, 8,N,1).
- *Pacific War 1.1* adds new commands and rule changes, and fixes bugs such as sinking ships appearing on the roster, and disintegration of ship icons.
- *Patriot* is undergoing a massive overhaul, and should be ready shortly.
- *Quest for Glory III Patch B* corrects all known errors.
- *Star Legions* fixes lock-ups,

- phaserfire, mission ratings, and the award sequence.
- *Stunt Island* and *F-15 Strike Eagle III* patches fix their install routines.
- *Tom Landry Strategy Football* patch 1.02 corrects modem play problems, excessive penalties, sound board conflicts, and animation.
- *Ultima Underworld III* has a patch for slow-down problems.
- *V for Victory: Utah Beach 2.0* has shipped. This updates *Utah Beach* to play with the enhancements added for *Vetkeze Luki* and *Market Garden*. It incorporates all the battlesets into a single menu, but is still buggy, and some scenarios won't run under the new system. 360 Pacific is working on a new version (2.11) to correct this.
- *X-Wing* corrects Roland sound card problems.

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Product Information Number 214

UNLIMITED ADVENTURES

For solo gamers, one of the big advantages computer FRPs have over their pen-and-paper cousins is the automation of the "dungeon master," that referee-cum-god who creates the scenario and decides the fate of adventurers. But while this obviously makes role-playing games more accessible, it also eliminates one of the best aspects of the genre—namely, creativity. In *Unlimited Adventures*, SSI attempts to compensate for this by allowing gamers to create their own dungeons and adventures.

Unlimited Adventures avoids the "fold-flap-A-into-slot-B" model-kit mentality that can hinder a build-your-own-adventure program. Like a paint program or word processor, *Unlimited Adventures* offers a set of tools gamers that can work with as they please. There's a limited number of terrain types, map templates, creatures, and events, but many of these can be modified, and the structure of any given adventure is wholly controlled by the user.

To show just how much can be done with *Unlimited Adventures*, SSI has included "The Heirs to Skull Crag," an adventure created solely with the tools available in the program. The quality of this adventure—as well as any you create—is decent; the sound rudimentary; and the graphics, though static, look as good as the latest Wizardry title, with a decent variety of dungeons and terrain types. In other words, you won't be fooled into thinking that you're playing the latest Ultima game, but what you are playing

is something of your own creation. You also can copy your games and send them to friends



who own *Unlimited Adventures*, which is a great way to get some objective input on your design work.

The design element is fairly intuitive and easily learned. Using maps and terrain, you can place treasures, specify the location of encounters, create small puzzles, and establish "triggers" which advance the story. You can edit the statistics for all the monsters in the



program's large online bestiary, and you can even create new and hybrid creatures. Also included with the program is a wide array of walls, doors, and other dungeon wallpaper. The graphics can be edited with a variety of paint programs, and PCX and LBM images can be imported as backdrops, first-person views, and NPCs.

Unlimited Adventures succeeds admirably in what it sets out to do: It offers a means to unleash the dungeon master in all of us that's just waiting to get out.

—T. Liam McDonald

ZOO

This arcade title from Gremlin Graphics kicks out the jams as soon as the intro screens fade. Forget simulations with five-pound manuals or role-playing epics that gobble months of your life—everything here boils down to the rugged pursuits of combat and plunder.

The manual never pins down what type of creature Zool is, except to call him an "interstellar cosmos dweller," but basically he looks like an



ant in ninja garb. Zool's spacecraft has crash-landed on a bizarre planet, and the only way out is for him to master all six of the planet's "worlds."

It's a platform game alright, but Zool's sharp and colorful design breathes ample life into the different settings. A quick glance at their titles (Sweet World, Fairground World, Toy World, etc.) gives the impression this is strictly kids' stuff—an electronic Candy Land. But you won't find any sugar coating on Zool. This is a tough little nut of a game, and it presents a formidable challenge even on the Easy setting. The main reason for the difficulty is Zool's life bar, which contains just three red



blocks. Just touching one of the wide variety of enemies and deadly obstacles costs you a block, and before you know it you're minus a life...then another...and another.

Thankfully, Gremlin has included a feature that allows you to save your progress at different "stations" throughout each level. Use up your five continues, and you can restart that level at the last station you visited. It's a smart design option that saves time and keeps frustration from setting in prematurely.

Zool is a solid dose of jump 'n' shoot entertainment. Game play is smooth with either joystick or keyboard, and the lev-



els are as attractive as they are dangerous. If you like arcade action but have had trouble finding a PC title that delivers the goods like a cart-based game, Zool is a must.

—Phil Powell

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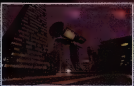
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Electronic Arts Inc. 1995



Product Information Number: 140

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Bullfinch Productions Ltd. 1995



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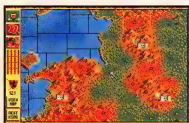


KINGDOMS OF ENGLAND II, VIKINGS: FIELDS OF GLORY

Despite its somewhat bloated title, this latest offering from Brian Vodnik and Realism Software is actually a lean and entertaining game of conquest and kingdom-building. Its simplicity and smooth learning curve make it an ideal wargame for beginners, yet it still has enough challenge for seasoned desktop generals who want a break from the 100-hour scenarios of Gary Grigsby's *Pacific War* or *V For Victory*. You'll be up and playing (and getting whupped by some serious opponents) in no time, and that's a plus for any wargame.

Vikings takes place in the 12th-century British Isles, as six kings vie for control of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The added historical twist here is that those pesky Vikings are succeeding like they never did before, and are slowly taking over the entire realm. Each of the six opponents (human or computer-controlled) starts off with a handful of territories, as well as a bit of gold and iron in the kitty.

The goal is to raise armies, conquer neighboring territories, increase production and tax revenue, and conquer more territories. Empty territories are defended by peasants: some cave in with minimal resistance, while others fight tooth-and-nail. Peasants, however, are the least of your problems. Enter territories occupied by enemy armies and the clash begins, to be decided rather abstractly by the computer. The lack of tactical control is a bit of a disappointment, but not enough to



hamper enjoyment. How many men are dedicated to the fight or held in reserve is up to you, as is the choice to retreat, but no battle formations or other options are available.

Once land is under your control, it can be cleared and improved, with five types of castles to be built and land to be used for farming or mining. Movable resources are always a boon, but the land also can yield wood, stone, or food in various quantities; surplus commodities can be sold off or transferred to territories where they're needed. Each territory is also capable of producing a certain number of military units, should supplies (iron or wood) and gold be available. Eight different units, from the lowly swordsman to the castle-crushing catapult, can be created and transferred into any resident army.

There is very little to complain about in *Vikings*: the main map is stylish, the interface clean and simple, and the game itself highly playable. The graphics are on par with those in every other game originally designed on the Amiga: nicely textured but with a narrow range of colors. More control over taxation or production would have been nice, but these are mere quibbles: *Vikings* is a definite winner.

— T. Liam McDonald

ROME: PATHWAY TO POWER

In this adventure from Maxis, you play a slave in the Roman Empire who, by hook or crook, tries to advance to the rank of Emperor. It sounds like fertile ground for gaming, but *firstLIGHT*, the game's developer, makes poor use of the concept.

At the start of the game, you get a nice sense of the pe-

ally used for game play, and it's almost impossible to imagine that the tiny fellow running around onscreen is you. The limited view causes an even greater problem during the battle sequences, in which you command a small army. When you order an attack, your troops immediately scamper off to tangle with the enemy, invariably leaving your character standing all alone. While battles can easily spread out over three screens, you only see what's happening in the one where you're standing.

But the greatest problem with *Rome* is its lack of depth. Each section of the game involves relatively few challenges, and some are downright simplistic. In one sequence, for example, your only real task is to run from citizen to citizen, bribing them to vote for you as Senator. Bribe enough of them, and you've succeeded.

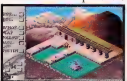
On top of it all are some of the worst save-game utilities we've seen. To save or load a game, you must quit to DOS! You can have only one saved game per "character" (i.e., the name you type when you start the game) — and the game doesn't show you a list of characters. Nor are there descriptions for saved games.

A serious approach to the game's premise might have at least allowed you to become absorbed in the Roman milieu, but off-target humor spoils even this chance for involvement.

— Matthew A. Firme



riod as you guide your togad character through appropriately ancient settings. But the atmosphere established by these visuals is undermined by the game's relentless attempts at contemporary humor. Characters with names like Flatulus and Erotica are the rule, and almost everyone seems to have a wisecrack or bad pun at the



ready. There's nothing wrong with humor in a game, but the material in *Rome* simply doesn't work.

A few bad jokes wouldn't be as damaging to the overall product if the game itself was absorbing. The oblique, *Populous*-like perspective means that less than half the screen is actu-

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V FOR VICTORY: MARKET GARDEN

Only once in his entire military career did General Bernard Montgomery plan and execute a truly daring and unorthodox military operation. On September 17, 1944, Monty launched Operation Market Garden, the largest airborne attack in history. American and British airborne divisions were dropped to secure the Dutch town of Arnhem and several key bridges leading to it, while a powerful but narrow armored thrust drove north to link up with them.

If successful, the operation would have placed the Allies across the Rhine before winter, poised within striking distance of the vital German industries of the Ruhr; the war might well have ended almost six months sooner than it did. It was a plan worthy of George Patton—but alas, Monty was no Patton, and the offensive collapsed into a

Victory scenario maintains all the striking virtues of the previous two modules, while refining the basic game system in a number of small, incremental



ways. A host of historical variants is included, so that war-gamers can refigure the battle, from either side, as they think it should have been fought.

The interface is a paradigm of good design, the graphics are truly elegant, and the action is hot. Documentation is thorough, refreshingly literate, and perfectly matched to the game's learning curve. The V for Victory series may, in fact, represent the apotheosis of the hex-based war game, the end product of decades of war-game evolution.

One warning, however: *Market Garden* requires three megs of RAM, whereas *Utah Beach* and *Verlitz Luki* only required two. The reason for this is not



bloody shambles due to a combination of bad luck and Montgomery's woefully lethargic leadership.

Because of its many "what if?" turning points, *Market Garden* makes an ideal computer simulation. Was the plan doomed from the start, or could the scheme have worked if this or that decision had been made sooner or more boldly?

Three-Sixty's latest V for

immediately apparent, since the actual battle was smaller in scale than those which inspired the two earlier games. (You'll also need a 386SX or better and SVGA graphics.)

If you have the hardware, by all means give *Market Garden* a try. Rich in detail and full of drama, *Market Garden* is further proof that this series just keeps getting better.

— William R. Trotter

GEAR WORKS

Gear Works sounds like the simplest puzzle game ever seen on a PC: Just string a series of intermeshing cogs together until you've connected the game's pre-set gears. When every little wheel turns like clockwork, you've solved that particular puzzle.

You're wondering "Is that all there is?" Well, yes...but that turns out to be quite enough. **Hollyware Entertainment's** mechanical puzzler is a lot like that old magic trick with the handcuffs; it looks ridiculously

you must also conserve as much space as possible. Otherwise, unwanted gears begin to accumulate on the pegs you need for useful gears.

Things would be nearly impossible if it weren't for the bombs you're given to eliminate problem gears. Between puzzles, an alternate screen features a slot machine offering a chance for extra bombs and bonus points. It's a nice change of pace, and a very welcome feature.

At first glance, *Gear Works* doesn't seem like anything special. The graphics are nothing to write home about, but that doesn't really matter in this type of game. The hundred or so puzzles (divided over



easy when you see it done, but things get considerably tougher when you try it yourself.

For one thing, you can't choose the size of the gears that pop on the screen, or the sequence in which they appear. Also, the gears already in place won't necessarily accept the new cog you're given.

Ultimately, though, mastering *Gear Works* depends on how well you manage each screen's limited amount of space. The screen is covered with pegs upon which you hang the gears; besides connecting the gears before time expires,

twelve levels) are the real attraction, and if you devote a little time to mastering the game controls (keyboard, joystick, and mouse are all supported), *Gear Works* can become a real obsession. Simple yet



unique, *Gear Works* has plenty to offer puzzle fans tired of "me too" games.

— Phil Powell

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PALADIN II

Fans of **Impression Software's** *Paladin* will want to immediately latch onto this sequel. Featuring 20 separate scenarios, *Paladin II* looks better and is easier to operate than the original, without sacrificing its fast play.

You play the role of the paladin in each quest, your companions change with each time a new scenario. You control all of the members of the party, moving them, attacking adjacent opponents, casting spells, and discovering magical items and scrolls. The entire game can be played via the mouse, and the commands are direct and simple.

In some ways, *Paladin II* is like a fantasy arcade game, with each quest representing another level of difficulty to surmount. There's no story linking the 20 quests, so don't expect to unravel a giant mystery; it's just one short adventure after another, with the emphasis on action rather than figuring out puzzles.

The map for each scenario is divided into squares. You begin each quest on the start square, from which you move each party member toward your destination. Practically everything the characters do costs movement points, and the total points available for each character changes as they're injured or encumbered. One of the nice features of the game is that, unlike many role-playing games, each character can operate independently from the

rest. If you want to divide the party into three groups, each with a different objective, it's entirely up to you.



Each quest has specific victory conditions. You must perform some combination of rescuing prisoners, finding white scrolls or destroying black ones, escaping the area, capturing sentry posts, or killing a specified percentage of opponents.

There's also a Quest Builder program for designing your own adventures. The Quest Builder is quite easy to use, and as long as you don't get carried away, you should be able to design a quest in an



hour or so. You can also chain quests together to create a campaign, allowing your paladin to survive a series of battles.

While *Paladin II* won't engage the campaign-length FRP fan, it does provide plenty of entertainment for those who want a quick, action-filled game with role-playing components.

— Neil Randall

AIDE DE CAMP

Computer war games have always had two big advantages over tabletop simulations: Sufficient setup space is never a

spread out for weeks on end. It's also a godsend for those who lack opponents for face-to-face competition: By trading ADC files back and forth on disk or over a modem, you can play a game against someone thousands of miles away.

As wonderful as all this sounds, however, you should be aware that transferring a board game onto your computer screen with ADC is a



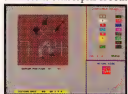
problem, and there's always an opponent available. But with a marvelous new utility called *Aide De Camp* (ADC) from **HPS Simulations**, board game devotees can enjoy some of the conveniences of computer gaming while playing their favorite paper-and-cardboard war games.

ADC is a cross between a war-game construction kit and a board-game assistance program. The program's powerful graphics routines enable users to create unit counters and a hex-based map on their PC, in effect generating an electronic version of any board game. ADC can't actually play out the game for you or administer the rules — the players still have to manually move the units around the map, resolve attacks, and so on. But within these limits, the program can maintain a complete, turn-by-turn record of a game, keeping track of each unit's movement and the results of combat. It can even roll the dice for you.

The applications of ADC are myriad. The program is ideal for anyone who relishes big games but doesn't have a spare ping-pong table on which to leave the maps and counters

complex, lengthy, and painstaking process. Depending on the game, drawing the map alone can easily take 10 or 20 hours. The 50-plus-page manual provides a thorough rundown on the different steps involved in the process, but it's still intimidating.

At least one board-game publisher has already announced plans to support the program by converting its own products to the ADC format and selling the ready-made disks for \$10 or \$15. Of course, users will still need to own copies of both



the specific board game and ADC. But it's not that great of a price to pay in order to enjoy all the benefits of the program without any of the attendant drudgery. If other companies follow suit, it could mean the reunion of war-gamers and their board-game collections.

— Jeff Seiken

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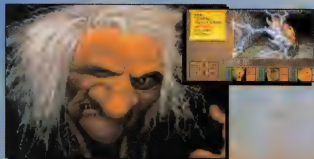
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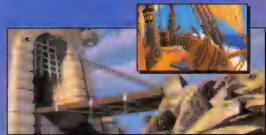
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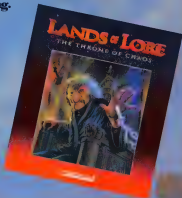
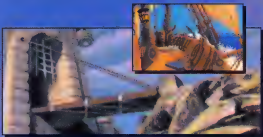
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MAD DOG MCCREE

This CD-ROM conversion of the laser-disc arcade hit puts you in the role of a stranger who's just moseyed into a sleepy Westernburg—just in time to save the townsfolk from the dastardly title character. The graphics in *American Laser Games'* shoot-em-up aren't as outstanding as in its arcade forebear, but the full-motion video is plenty good



enough to give you an itchy trigger finger.

You're greeted by a loquacious prospector who looks like a cross between Gabby Hayes and Jack Elam. Before he can finish telling you about how Mad Dog has kidnapped the mayor and his daughter, two of McCree's boys appear to silence him permanently. If you don't plug these two guys, the game won't let you win certain gunfights no matter how fast a draw you are.

You'll blast your way through nine different locales, starting at the saloon and ending in a *High Noon* showdown against Mad Dog, a challenge made even more difficult by the fact that he's somehow managed to get his filthy hands on a 19th-century bulletproof vest.

Playing *Mad Dog McCree* is a simple matter of aiming an

on-screen pistol with your mouse and clicking to fire; just drag the pistol to the bottom of the screen to reload. You start with a standard six-shooter, but shooting various objects eventually increases your pistol's capacity to 12 shots. Three levels of difficulty make the game fun even for greenhorns, and unlimited continues mean that you'll probably reach the final scene in just a few hours (outdrawing Mad Dog, however, may take as long as the rest of the game combined). But don't think *Mad Dog McCree* is a poor value: It's a great game for parties, bound to impress friends who want to see an "Oh, wow!" CD-ROM title.



Despite the profuse gunplay, there's no blood spilled in *Mad Dog McCree*, so all but the most politically correct should get a kick out of it. The acting ranges from decent to very good, the sound effects are excellent, and there's no learning curve to worry about. It's a ton of fun, plain and simple. Check it out.

—Stephen Poole

VIRTUAL REALITY STUDIO 2.0

If you've seen *The Lawnmower Man* or *Wild Palms*, you're probably dying for a chance to create a virtual reality of your own, if only to show the world how it's supposed to be done. *Virtual Reality Studio 2.0*, from Domark Software, offers you a chance to do just that. The world you design won't be anywhere

result is a package that's significantly easier to use.

But it's still hard work. The objects and backgrounds included with the program certainly help you get started, but producing anything that resembles 3-D reality requires much patience and dedication. *VRS 3.0* is, in effect, a construction

program, but its open-ended design means that you'll have to experiment quite a while before you decide exactly what you want to achieve with it.

Fortunately, *VRS 2.0* comes with two worthwhile tutorials.

The first is in the manual, and it's not only useful but also well-written and funny. The second is on a short VHS videotape; watching it should give you an idea of how involved you'll want to get with *VRS 2.0*.

Back in computing's earlier days, several construction sets let you build games essentially from top to bottom. Despite claims to the contrary, however, they were basically programming kits. *VRS 2.0* is similar, albeit more polished,



near as complex as the ones in those big-buck productions, but then again they weren't the real thing.

With *VRS 2.0*, you create scenes filled with moving and static objects. When you're satisfied with your design, you can begin moving around the scene, looking up and down, traveling around objects until you find the perspective you want. Plunk a statue in the middle of a room, for example, and you can walk around and look at it from behind. When you get really good, you can even create 3-D games.

VRS 2.0 picks up where version 1.0 left off. This one includes a disk filled with objects and scenes, so unlike the first product you won't have to build almost everything yourself. The interface has also been streamlined, and the total

and capable of much richer results. It's extremely strong, but it's definitely not for the casual designer of virtual worlds.

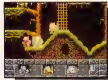
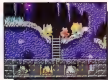
—Neil Randall



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Product Information Number 182

THE SECRET CODES OF C.Y.P.H.E.R. — OPERATION U.S. PRESIDENTS

This educational adventure from **Tanager Software** puts you in the role of an agent for C.Y.P.H.E.R., an organization that runs a confidential message-delivery system. There are 16 clients to choose from, and ten messages per client, so kids have plenty to work on before finishing the entire game.

After picking a client, you're given the address of three C.Y.P.H.E.R. contacts, each with

with game play: Their faces only appear for a few seconds when you enter the wrong part of the city. The flow of action is choppy, more like an unwieldy combo of Presidential Trivial Pursuit and a coded "Wheel of Fortune" than a single, cohesive game. The Fencyclopeda (the game's database) has plenty of presidential tidbits and info on historical events that happened during each president's term, but sorely lacks a concise synopsis that conveys the important events of a presidency.

You're told, for instance, that Rutherford Hayes was called "The Fraud President" because he won the electoral vote but

lost the popular vote. You're not told, however, that such an outcome can legitimately occur, nor that the real reason for the nickname was that the disputed returns of four states were awarded to Hayes by a special commission. You learn that McKinley (the "Napoleon" of Protection, according to the Fencyclopeda) "won" the Spanish-American War — but no mention is made of the sinking of the *Maine*, Dewey's triumph at Manila Bay, or Teddy's charge up San Juan Hill.

Operation U.S. Presidents takes up only 700K of hard-disk space, which probably explains both the lack of in-depth info and the game's crude graphics. There's no denying you can learn interesting facts from *Operation U.S. Presidents*, but whether you kids will stick with it long enough to do so is another question.

There are numerous flaws niggling at the edges of *Operation U.S. Presidents*. Enemy agents allegedly try to thwart you, but have nothing to do



HOCKEY LEAGUE SIMULATOR 2.0

If *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3* doesn't meet all your hockey demands, you'll want to check out *Hockey League Simulator 2.0* from **Bethesda Softworks**. Compatible with *Gretzky 3*, *HLS2* is more complete and more user-friendly than the first version. You take control of as much or as little of hockey management as you like, with the greatest challenge lying in running a team from start to finish.

Though a few pretty pictures have been added to the presentation, *HLS2* is still basically a text-based program. The emphasis is on statistical management: Player stats, financial stats, and performance stats can all be manipulated and changed. With that in mind, it's safe to say that *HLS2* will appeal only to those who fully understand hockey and who want to see what it's like to hire and trade players and coaches in order to reach the championships.

As general manager, you can replace your coach, trade players, send guys back to the minors, or bring them up to the big time. You can examine the rosters for both pro and farm teams, peruse finances and

player waivers, and take control of player salaries.

If you assume the role of head coach, you can set the team roster, choose the starting goalie, and establish your team's lines. As in *Gretzky 3*, you set lines for even-strength situations and all combinations of power-play and short-handed play (5-on-4, 3-on-5,

etc.); in truth, this is probably the coach's primary role.

You can set the game so that coaches affect player statistics, and if you're ambitious, you can even manage every team in the league. *HLS2* also gives you the power to create entire leagues from scratch, with a variety of automatic and manual functions for drafting players, setting budgets, and establishing farm teams. Using this module, you can create and manage fantasy leagues with a number of other players.

Lacking the graphics and arcade options of *Gretzky 3*, it's clear that *HLS2* is for die-hard hockey fans. But any sports buff interested in the inner workings of a professional sport will want a look at it — it's as strong a stats-oriented sports package as you'll find.

— Neil Randall



— Stephen Poole

Turn up the volume of fun on your PC with the Sound Machine from QuickShot. It's got everything you need to bring a new dimension of sound to your computer. Like a sound card that's guaranteed 100% Sound Blaster™ compatible. Two high-performance PC speakers. And an ergonomic joystick.

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DOS 6: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU ?

NEIL RANDALL

Over the past couple of years, software packages designed to supplement or even supplant Microsoft's MS-DOS have achieved widespread popularity. Operating systems (DR-DOS6), disk-compression utilities (Stacker and SuperStor), memory managers (386Max and QEMM386) anti-virus programs (Norton Anti-Virus), and backup utilities (FastBack and Central Point Backup) all served notice that end users wanted to maximize the power of their PCs. And because computer games typically require more of your system than any other application you're likely to use, gamers made up a big chunk of the people buying these performance-enhancing programs.

With the arrival of DOS 6, it's clear that Microsoft recognizes that these utilities are more than just frills. Just look at what's new in version 6: on-the-fly data compression, automatic memory management, virus checking, and a good hard-disk backup utility (DOS 5 did have a rudimentary backup function). Toss in a few commands that bring DOS out of the dark ages (there's finally a Move command!), and there's every reason to seriously consider the upgrade.

But what does DOS 6 offer specifically for gamers that they couldn't achieve with DOS 5? Several things. First, it helps make as much memory available as possible, a crucial factor when some games demand as much as 590-600K of RAM. Second, it offers more hard disk space, another vital concern when games that occupy 15-plus megabytes (and as high as 40) are no longer uncommon. Third, it allows multiple configurations, which means no longer having to edit start-up files to meet the requirements of different games.

The two major additions



to DOS 6 are MemMaker and DoubleSpace. MemMaker automatically analyzes your CONFIG.SYS and AUTO-EXEC.BAT files, then tries out a variety of configurations in an attempt to free up as much of your machine's base memory as possible. DoubleSpace uses data compression technology to shrink all the files on your hard drive, in effect increasing its capacity by 50-70 percent. That 80-meg drive can suddenly store 130 megabytes of data or even more.

MemMaker doesn't do as good a job as dedicated memory managers such as QEMM or 386Max. It's not as aggressive, in keeping with Microsoft's tradition of playing it safe—but it works. Even a computer loaded with fax boards, CD-ROMs,

sound cards, and other peripherals can usually be assisted by MemMaker better than by manually editing CONFIG.SYS and AUTO-EXEC.BAT. Without all these peripherals, it's easy to come away with well over 600K of free memory, sometimes as high as 620-630K, even with DoubleSpace operating.

Even with DoubleSpace operating? Yes, DoubleSpace takes memory, about 40K. But MemMaker will shove it quite happily into high memory (the memory between 640K and 1MB), along with DOS, SmartDrive (improved over the version in DOS 5), and a host of other device drivers and TSRs.

Like MemMaker, DoubleSpace isn't as aggressive as third-party data compression packages like Stacker or SuperStor, but it avoids those packages' greatest annoyance.

With Stacker and SuperStor, it's necessary to keep two sets of CONFIG.SYS and AUTO-EXEC.BAT files, one on the compressed portion of your hard drive and another on the uncompressed area. With DoubleSpace, data compression is part of DOS itself, and only one set of start-up files is necessary.

With DoubleSpace you can expect to gain 60-70 percent of hard drive space; Stacker and SuperStor usually give an 80 percent increase. The two third-party programs also contain defragmentation programs that work much better on compressed drives than DOS 6's abysmal offering. But since DoubleSpace does a fairly good job and comes with the operating system, the price is right. Take care when using any compression utility, though: Some games don't support disk compression, so you might want to leave a healthy portion of your hard drive uncompressed.

Setting up multiple configurations with DOS 6 isn't exactly intuitive, but the manual and Help files make things manageable. Multiple configurations can be especially useful for gamers: some new entertainment titles use expanded memory but others want only extended memory, and DOS 6 can be configured to let you choose between the two at boot-up. DOS 6 also lets you boot clean, loading no drivers or programs at all (except itself), extremely handy if you have a peripheral or TSR that's incompatible with a game.

If you already own third-party software for memory management, disk compression, and virus protection, DOS 6 doesn't offer a lot. If you don't own any of these, however, DOS 6 is a bargain.

GP

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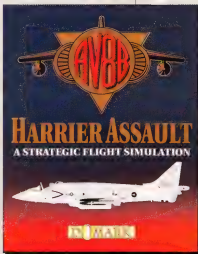
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VIFFING FOR A LIVING: THE HARRIER INVASION

JUMP JET AND HARRIER AV-8B VIE FOR THE V/STOL CROWN

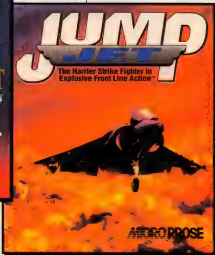


T. LIAM MCDONALD

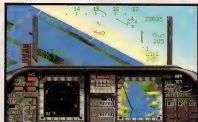
In 1982, during the Falklands War, the Harrier became one of the most famous fighter/bombers in the world. While the combat performance of this unusual plane exceeded anyone's expectations, it was the sight of a fixed-wing aircraft hovering like a helicopter and coming to complete stops in midair that caught people's imaginations. This ugly metal beast, with its

massive intakes and high snout, seemed to defy gravity and all laws of flight, and though Vertical/Short Take-Off and Landing (V/STOL) planes had been in service for over two decades, it was clear that the Falklands marked the advent of the Harrier.

It has been a long, twisting road for V/STOL craft. From Hawker Siddeley's initial development of the Harrier in the



1950s, through a bewildering tangle of co-development and international politics that had Great Britain, the U.S., and Germany all working in tandem at various times, it seemed that plans for V/STOL might never be realized. The original initiative came from the Bristol Engine Company's development of the Orpheus turbofan engine, which was designed to direct exhaust airflow not only to the



Jump Jet

rear, but also at progressively downward angles. It was the genesis of "vectored thrust," and the result was a plane that could take off vertically.

The modern AV-8B Harrier is a subsonic, single-engine aircraft, with a max speed topping out around 660 mph (half the speed of the F-15 or F-16). Its Rolls Royce engine produces about 21,500 lbs. of thrust, which means you can perform VTOL with about 7000 lbs. of weaponry; the maximum payload for STOL is about 17,000 lbs. It flies with all major types of ordnance (guided A4 missiles, dumb bombs, laser-guided bombs, unguided rockets, and cluster bombs), and two 25mm, five-barrel rotary guns.

Four nozzles direct engine thrust at angles from 0 degrees to 98 degrees. In flight, and especially in close-quarter dogfighting, these nozzles can be redirected to drastically reduce airspeed. The technique is called VIFFing (Vectoring in Forward Flight), and is the best way to force a bandit on your six to overfly you, placing him in a prime-killing zone. (At very low speeds, mostly during landing, the Harrier can even fly backwards.) While the value of VIFFing was not proven in the Falklands — Argentine aircraft used their stand-off air-to-air capability to maximum effect, never getting into the close-quarters dogfighting where viffing would make a big difference — it's bound to change the close-quarter combat equation in the future.

The real place for the Harrier is on light aircraft carriers, whose short runways are perfectly suited for the jet's amazing take-off capabilities. This is no air-superiority fighter, but a formidable attack and close-

support craft with enough payload capacity to make it a real menace. With all this going for it, there was little doubt that flight-sim developers would eventually get around to the Harrier —

but no one expected two Harrier simulations at once.

MicroProse and Domark may have made it to the marketplace almost simultaneously with *Jump Jet* and *AV-8B Harrier Assault*, but it's hard to imagine how two simulations of the same airplane could be more different in their approaches: even the instrument panels are totally different! Each has its strengths and weaknesses, with neither emerging the hands-down victor. But that may change soon; Domark is planning to release an SVGA version of *AV-8B Harrier Assault* (that version will require an S3 accelerator chip).

IN THIS CORNER...

Jump Jet is a product of MicroProse's U.K. division, and consequently it has the comfortable look and feel of every other MicroProse flight sim. A series of clean, attractive transition screens makes navigating the different areas of the game a breeze, and there's a wide variety of difficulty levels and combat options to customize the game to your liking. A main screen leads to instant dogfights, an Aces list, pilot roster,

debriefing, global map for choosing theater of operations, game type and difficulty settings, etc. There's a broad range of difficulty settings for flight model, weapons, opponents, and landings, making for a smooth learning curve for first-time fliers. Single missions, a full day of sorties, or an extended campaign can each be flown in any of three scenarios.

Flying either for the U.S. Marine Corps in the AV-8B or for the RAF in the Harrier GR Mk. 7 seems to make no real difference — all scenarios are still available, and neither instrumentation or handling change. The theaters of combat are all fairly obvious future-shock scenarios: Tensions are high between China and Great Britain on the eve of the reversion of Hong Kong to China in 1996; the Falklands just couldn't stay peaceful for long, and in 1997 the Argentines are back for more trouble. Possibly the most interesting scenario, at least graphically, is Nordkapp, set in 1998 and featuring arctic combat against hard-line Soviets in Norway.

As usual for MicroProse, the terrain graphics, exterior views, ground and air opposition, and cockpit displays are all excellent. Weapons operations — such as loadout, target acquisition, and effectiveness — are all that a newcomer or buff could desire. True, target acquisition is very tricky in realistic mode, but there are several

aiming and acquisition modes to choose from, as well as a variety of HUD and Multi-Function Display configurations you can tweak for maximum efficiency. Early-warning systems in the AV-8B are rudimentary at best, and are sure to keep a pilot on his toes searching for enemy incoming. Coming straight from *F-15 Strike Eagle III*, the lack of a second set of eyes during confrontations was very pronounced. Unlike other high-tech planes, there's no Bitchin' Betty or computerized fly-by-wire systems, making the AV-8B more challenging in combat situations.

Now for the meat of the beast: the flight model. On realistic mode, it is, for all intents and purposes, all one could ask



Jump Jet

for. Avionics are superior, and lift, drag, and weight distribution are all handled admirably. New elements have entered the formula, though, thanks to almost a hundred nozzle angles with which you can experiment. The short take-off from a light flattop is a joy to experience — with nozzles set to 50 degrees on takeoff, the plane becomes airborne in a matter of seconds. Upon mission completion, with no weapons onboard and a light fuel load, you'll return to land at slow speeds, gently angle the nozzles to 80-90 degrees, and come to a complete stop before floating gently to the ground or flight deck. If the position is wrong, the nozzles can be angled slightly forward (up to 98 degrees) and the plane will fly backwards for a better landing angle.

VIFFing during target approach allows more time for acquisition, and makes it easier to circle slowly around a target for multiple strikes. Bandit on your tale? No problem! Crank back those nozzles and line that



Jump Jet

sucker up for the kill. It's an entirely new experience, and both *Jump Jet* and *AV-8B Harrier Assault* replicate it admirably.

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

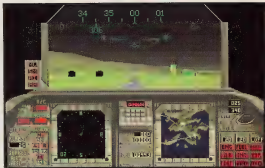
Some may see *Jump Jet* as simply the next in a long line of MicroProse flight simulators: they've published dozens, and almost all have been exceptionally well-done. One reason for that consistency, however, is that MicroProse seems to have settled on a single format and stuck doggedly to it. While this allows players to move from one MicroProse sim to the next with great ease, it also creates a certain sense of sameness in all the games. The campaign mode

in MicroProse sims, for example, has never been much to rejoice about: A rather loosely strung-together series of single missions, the campaigns always unfold the

same way and have little cohesion or narrative drive: in a word, boring.

That's where Domark's *AV-8B Harrier Assault* enters the picture, and air-combat sims will never be judged the same again. Sure, it's a flight simulator, but it's also a fairly complex tactical war game. Rather than offering three theaters of action with sparse setups, Domark has elected to create a single scenario which is both detailed and believable.

The action takes place off the coast of East Timor, in South-



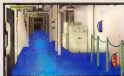
Jump Jet

east Asia. Divided east and west between Indonesia and Portugal, the area has long been a hotspot. In *AV-8B*, Portuguese overtures for turning East Timor over to the Timorese for independent rule have prompted sectional violence and the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia. Factional fighting and the escalation of human rights violations have prompted Portugal to put pressure on both the U.S. and U.N. for stronger measures and military intervention. It's a very timely, very plausible scenario, and lends *AV-8B* an air of realism that MicroProse games often lack.

We join the fray at the outset of Operation Ocean Saber, a small-scale U.S.M.C. operation to aid the Timorese resistance against Indonesia. A small naval task force off the coast of Timor — consisting of the light carrier *Tarawa*, six amphibious-warfare vessels, a destroyer, three frigates, and a tanker — is all the military muscle you have at your disposal. At the core of the operation are 16 *AV-8B* Harriers based on the *Tarawa*. The main navigation screen (much

like Falcon's Command Center) guides the gamer to the flight deck, TAWADS (Tactical Amphibious Warfare Data System), configuration screens, and below decks, where landing craft, supplies, and the flight deck can all be viewed to determine the current state of the battle.

At the core of Domark's design is an entirely new concept in flight simulators, and one from which other designers could learn a great deal. Not only do you hop in and fly the missions, you also plan them out, along with troop landings and helicopter support. The TAWADS screen, in fact, is a self-contained tactical war game, from which all mission



AV-8B Harrier Assault

operations are planned, commanded, and evaluated. As in any war game, Primary Targets are designated to be neutralized from the air, with ground forces landing to mop up. The difference here is that you can jump in at any time during the mission and take control of any one of the 16 planes.

If either the TAWADS system or the flight sim were weak, this would be a minor achievement at best. But Domark has succeeded in creating both an involving tactical game and a complex simulator. The program comes with a ready-made battle plan — titled SABER — which can be played out to the



AV-8B Harrier Assault

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finish, or you can design your own plan from scratch. Even when using SABER, however, varying mission outcomes and the inherently fluid nature of combat mean that you'll have to jump in and designate new targets. Left to its own devices, both SABER and the flight sim will run on their own, but neither does so flawlessly. Computer-flown Harrier missions are never as effective as those controlled by the player, and blindly following an initial battle plan is the sure path to defeat.

It takes a little experimentation to get the hang of the TAWADS control center. Based around an extremely well-done map of the island, the TAWADS allows you to watch and alter all mission operations in real-time, or at slower or faster speeds. The map zooms in to an astounding level of detail, and the amount of information that's displayed can be adjusted with a number of detail

settings. Harrier flights, troop positions, and task force movement are all graphically represented and constantly updated. Forces can be redirected at any time using a simple series of menus, while the strength and losses for both sides are detailed in another screen. The entire system is simple enough for the novice war-gamer to use, but complex enough to satisfy the control-minded grognard. It's an excellent system, one that blows typical flight-sim cam-



AV-8B Harrier Assault

paigns out of the water. Never has this level of control been available in this good a simulation, and others would be well-advised to take a page from Domark's book in the future.

And what about the actual simulation? No, the graphics are not as good as those in *Jump Jet*, but the aforementioned SVGA version may right this inequity; the preliminary versions we saw at Winter CES certainly looked outstanding. The graphics for the cockpit, terrain, and enemy forces are all adequate to good. Up close, ground structures have a surprising amount of detail, but from a distance the graphics lack the shading and nuances of *Jump Jet*. AV-8B flies a little better than *Jump Jet*, with a greater sense of drag and weight distribution; as far as avionics, sheer handling goes to AV-8B by a hair, but in truth it's so close that it's hard to tell.

Loadout, targeting, delivery, and so on are all on par with *Jump Jet*, though you can't see the cannon firing when you

access an external view. AV-8B has a much steeper learning curve than *Jump Jet*, due largely to weak, unillustrated documentation and only a single difficulty toggle (which seems to affect drag and handling). But the AV-8B manual does have an excellent historical summary and details on the Harrier itself, while the *Jump Jet* manual suffers from having none.

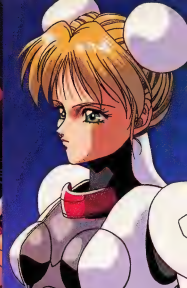
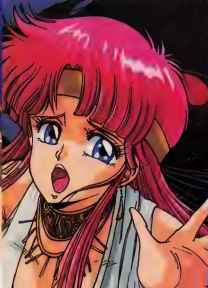
AND THE WINNER IS...

In the final analysis, both *Jump Jet* and AV-8B are unquestionably superior sims. The graphics contest goes to MicroProse, and it also wins when it comes to the variety of individual missions — with only one theater, the missions in AV-8B *Harrier Assault* soon begin to seem alike. As far as mission depth and planning options, though, there's no sim on the market that can touch AV-8B.

It's a safe assumption that neither MicroProse or Domark are happy about such direct competition, but in reality each game will appeal to a different type of flight-sim fan. If you've seen enough of pretty landscapes, then the depth of AV-8B is probably what you're looking for you. On the other hand, if you'd rather not be burdened by having to plan your own flights, the better bet is *Jump Jet*. Between the two of them, air-combat aficionados should be busy for some time to come.



AV-8B Harrier Assault



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T. LIAM MCDONALD

A DELUGE OF FRENCH GAMES HITS AMERICA'S SHORES

America is being invaded: not by aliens, or Elvis impersonators, or militant Canadian Mounties, but by wave after wave of foreign computer games. These aren't inferior, polyester computer games cranked out in sweatshops in Calcutta. Nope, this is the real stuff: Truly original, cutting-edge PC games are being produced on foreign soil and brought to this country in unprecedented numbers by major American game publishers. And the majority of this software is coming not from Japan or England, but from France.

That's right, the country that gave us Maurice Chevalier, edible snails, and teeming hordes of Jerry Lewis fans has become a wellspring for quality games, and what the British Invasion did for rock 'n' roll in the 60s, the French Invasion may well do for PC games in the 90s.

French games aren't an entirely new sight on American PC screens. But the last six months have seen a real boom in imports, with major companies like Sierra On-Line,SSI, and Interplay picking up more and more product for distribution. Developers like Coktel Vision, Delphine, Infogrames, and Kallisto are all releasing stylish, innovative, unique, challenging games, attracting a large following and creating strong sales.

Recently we've seen *Gobliins* (Coktel Vision), *Out of this World* (Delphine), and *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames) all garner high praise. *Gobliins* was a delightful surprise, with a cartoonish flavor and moderately challenging puzzles that were instantly appealing. In both *Out of this World* and *Alone in the Dark* we saw characters moving within their environments in entirely new ways. Not only did all three of these games look new and different, they also played differently.

Bringing these games to America isn't always a simple matter. Ken Williams, president of Sierra On-Line, forged a relationship with Coktel Vision in order to bring their hit educational title *Adi* to the States, only to discover that doing so meant not only changing the language, but also altering cultural references that would mean little to American children. Coktel's erotic adventure game *Fascination* was going to be a Sierra product, but when the American design team took out all the sex, there was little left and the project was scrapped. Even in *Gobliins 2*, a particularly well-endowed fountain had to undergo a breast reduction.

Overall, the adaptation of these French titles went smoothly, with only a few cross-cultural clunkers (an Incan king with a decidedly French accent, error messages in the wrong language, etc.). There's clearly a difference in style and tone between French and American games, and the infusion of Old World sensibilities and alternative approaches into the New World marketplace brings a fresh perspective that's sure to influence American designers in the future. Here's a look at some of the major French publishers and their current crop of titles.

COKTEL VISION

"When I first saw *Inca*, it just blew me away."

So says Ken Williams, who brought the distinctive games of Coktel Vision to America. Founded in 1984 by Roland Oskian, Coktel is Europe's leading developer of entertainment and educational titles, with their most successful title — the educational program *Adi* — selling over

a quarter-million copies in France alone. Through Sierra, four Coktel games have been released in America and three more (*Lost in Time*, *Inca 2*, and *Gobliins 3*) are in the works.

The first Coktel game Sierra distributed was *Gobliins*, a charming and funny puzzle game that appeals to both children and grownups.

Gobliins 2 soon followed, with the adventure game *The Prophecy* hot on its heels. But the most impressive title from Coktel is a multimedia adventure called *Inca*, available on both disk and CD-ROM. Fusing Incan history and myth with the trappings of traditional science-fiction, designer Yannick Chosse created a true interactive movie, in which the fate of the Incas is in the hands of the player. The result is an eclectic, fascinating gaming experience.

Five hundred years ago a small, tired force of Spaniards brought about the fall of an empire larger than any in the world at that time. At the start of *Inca*, the dying Incan emperor Huayna Capac has a vision of bearded men from a foreign land coming to conquer his nation. Knowing what lies ahead for his people, he hides the powers of the Incas far away, until the long-awaited day when a savior arises. Incan prophecy tells of the Golden One, El Dorado, who will return to bring Inti, the sun, back to life.

In *Inca*, you are El Dorado, and you must fulfill the prophecy to defeat the Spaniards and restore the Incan nation to its former greatness. For some unknown reason, the prophecy has been transposed in space and time, and El Dorado must battle spacefaring Spanish galleons and conquistadors with lasers. What the story lacks in logic — Spaniards in space? — it makes up for with a kind of crazed exuberance that has the feeling of Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter books.

The quest is to travel space and time, battling Spaniards and solving puzzles to retrieve Incan wisdom and power. Opposing you through all this derring-do is Aguirre (based on an actual explorer who broke away from Pizarro's South American expedition in 1560), a somewhat enigmatic foe who is equal parts monk, wizard, and conquistador. His galleons and troops challenge you at every point in your journey, with both space and hand-to-hand combat. El Dorado's spacefighter — shaped like a sacrificial Tumi knife — fires plasma bolts, "jaguar" homing missiles, and mouse-guided "sun stars"; on the ground he wields a hand-held laser.

Inca opens with the Tumi ship flying through an asteroid field before screaming into a planetside trench for some *Star Wars*-inspired combat. Arcade sequences don't always work in adventure games, but in *Inca* they add an effective dimension that gives the game more variety. While the asteroid sequence is a touch



Inca



Inca



Inca



Inca

scenes that further the story. The closer El Dorado comes to restoring Inti, the more frantic Aguirre becomes, and the more challenging the obstacles he places before you.

Each element of the game is smoothly executed. The award-winning graphics are downright gorgeous, the music is rich and varied (though the pop-stylings of the title song in the CD-ROM version, "Inca People," is a little too smarmy), and the video is smooth and clear. You can always ask Huayna Capac for a general hint, and a small "dictionary" of words and characters helps track the increasingly elaborate story. The CD-ROM version of *Inca* features extended speech (where the Incan Huayna Capac speaks English with a French accent) and beefed-up music.

If there's a flaw in *Inca*, it lies in the very linear plot. You have no choice where you'll go; succeeding in one task leads



Inca



Inca

immediately to the next. At times you get the sense that the game is playing you rather than the other way around. If the story were less entertaining or the game less technically accomplished, this could be fatal, but *Inca* keeps things rolling right along, making the lack of the choices more of a disappointment than a fatal defect.

Inca is an odd, refreshing mix of puzzle adventure and arcade game. The story is a fascinating blend of history, myth, and fiction, with no pretenses to being anything more than enjoyable fantasy. Aside from the final trench battle, the foes are never so difficult that a few tries won't bring success, and the puzzles never become so elaborate as to fluster. The CD-ROM version, is probably the finest multimedia game to date. Regardless of which version you play, though, *Inca* is a winner.

THE PROPHECY

The same can't always be said for Coktel's other major adventure title, *The Prophecy*, a good game somewhat marred

by contrived puzzles. Without an elaborate score, extensive video, or spoken dialogue, *The Prophecy* is a much more traditional adventure game in the tradition of Sierra's *King's Quest* series.

The titular prophecy decrees that, on the day of the great eclipse, if three grains of sand are placed in the Revuss hourglass by a brave hero, the enemy will be vanquished. There are only three days for the prophecy to be fulfilled, and numerous obstacles stand in the way. The three grains of sand are obtained by performing three quests: opening the seal to the temple, vanquishing the Dragon with a Hundred Faces, and convincing the guardian to open the Sanctuary where the Revuss waits.

The gamer assumes the role of a young magician named Ween, apprentice to Ohkram, the master sorcerer of the Kingdom of the Blue Rocks. Ohkram is growing weak and cannot fulfill the prophecy or fight Kraal, the evil wizard he banished from the kingdom, so Ween must take his place.

Ween isn't alone in his quest. Two silly little mustachioed men, Ubi and Orbi, carry his bags but do little else; Petro, Ohkram's old friend, communicates with Ween telepathically and translates ancient scripts for him; and a fruit-eating bat named Urm comes when Ween blows his magic flute. If given strawberries or blueberries, Urm will help with certain puzzles or tasks.

The quality of these puzzles is hit-and-miss. Most succeed, but some seem forced and others require tasks to be done within a time limit. Ultimately, it is the overly elaborate and sometimes silly puzzles that undermine an otherwise good game. There's also no real sense of danger throughout the entire proceedings, since Kraal is pretty much kept offstage, and is never enough of a threat to make things suspenseful. These shortcomings aside, *The Prophecy* is still an enjoyable and stylish game.

GOBLINS 2

The original *Goblins* had the sort of instant appeal to both children and adults that almost guarantees success for a video or computer game. While a goofy, cartoonish style and mildly challenging series of puzzles are important elements in its success, it's the three goblins who were the stars of this show. Each had a distinct personality, performing different onscreen antics to indicate boredom, surprise, or pain. And each one possessed a unique ability: BoBo punches things, Dwayne picks things up, and Hooter has magical powers. Figuring out how they worked together within the environment to solve the puzzle — and watching their expressions when they failed — was a large part of the fun.

The goblins saved the king from a bedeviling sorcerer, but his highness is in trouble again, and two more of the little fellows are back to help. An evil wizard named Amoniak has kidnapped the king's son and made him into a court-jester. Winkle and Fingus are the two unlikely heroes sent to retrieve him. Neither has a skill or innate ability; instead it's their personalities that are the key to problem



The Prophecy



Goblins 2

solving. Winkle is a wise-guy: reckless, daring, and rude. Fingus is more cautious and patient. Finding out which gets the best results in a given situation, and getting the two to work together at the same time, is the point of the game.

Obviously, this is a bit more intangible than the original game, in which you knew *exactly* what each goblin could do. In certain circumstances Fingus' finesse is obviously a better approach than Winkle's head-on tactics, or Winkle's recklessness is necessary to perform a dangerous feat while only Fingus can figure out how something works. Eventually, this becomes a little too nebulous and random, with trial and error playing a more important role in many of the screens. Some players may like this system better, while others prefer the clarity of the original.

In order to save the prince, Fingus and Winkle have to traverse seven worlds in the kingdom, each with a series of interconnected, object-oriented puzzles. Along the way, they meet an assorted bunch of oddballs and people in need, all of whom they need to trick, cajole, or help in order to continue with their quest. Gamers are treated to colorful graphics, silly sounds, outraged expressions, and raging impatience from the two little dudes. *Gobliins 2* retains many of the qualities that made its predecessor a winner. With Coktel now working on *Gobliins 3*, featuring a single goblin that metamorphoses to suit the situation, we sure haven't heard the last from these guys.

DELPHINE SOFTWARE

Delphine's first big American hit was last year's *Out of This World*. Combining adventure and arcade elements with distinctive polygon graphics, it had an unusual look that brought new smoothness to character animation. Right behind *Out of This World* came *Cruise for a Corpse*, a mystery game with a solid plot, fair but challenging puzzles, and a



Flashback

nice cinematic feel. Not content to rest on their laurels, Delphine has pushed PC adventure gaming to a new level with its latest, *Flashback*, already available for the Sega Genesis. The fluid animation, futuristic storyline, and no-holds-barred gunplay could make this the surprise hit of the year for U.S. publisher SSL. Never has a character in a game moved this smoothly. Standing, running, jumping, climbing, rolling, firing his gun: all are rendered in smooth, flowing side-view animation with occasional closeups and cinematic cut-scenes.

The plot, freely lifted from John Carpenter's *They Live*, concerns a pair of glasses that your character, Conrad, has created. These glasses allow the wearer to determine molecular densities, giving Conrad a glimpse of something no one wanted him to see: that certain important government officials are actually aliens disguised as humans. It's not long before the aliens learn that Conrad knows their secret,

so they wipe his memory and throw him in prison.

The game begins with Conrad escaping on a space-bike only to crash-land in the jungle. A message on a holocube directs him to the city of New Washington, but first he must pick his way through a series of traps and pesky guards with only his agility and a pistol. A combination of arcade dexterity and problem-solving skills are necessary to get Conrad through all the various levels and places he has to go in order to regain his memory and undo the aliens' nefarious schemes.

While it's the jaw-dropping animation that makes *Flashback* instantly appealing, the fast pace and intelligent design are what keep you entranced. More than just pretty pictures, *Flashback* is a clever, involving, action-packed game with just the right mixture of arcade play and adventure gaming. This is definitely going to be one of the hot games of the year.

INFOGRADES

Only a few months ago, *Alone in the Dark* from Infogrames hit the shelves under the I-Motion label and surprised the heck out of everyone. Seemingly coming out of nowhere,



Eternam

this polygon-modeled horror game stole some thunder from the much anticipated *The 7th Guest* with its bizarre look, involved story, and creepy atmosphere.

Like Delphine, Infogrames has made it quite clear with their second domestic title, *Eternam*, that it intends to continue forging new ground. *Eternam* is an extremely bizarre combination of first-person combat in a polygon-based countryside, side-view adventure gaming while indoors, and delightful *Dragon's Lair*-style cartoon animation for closeups. If this sounds like a patchwork recipe for an overextended game, think again! *Eternam* blends all these disparate elements quite flawlessly in a campy sci-fi adventure reminiscent of Michael Crichton's 1974 movie *Westworld*.

As Don Jonz, you just want a vacation on Eternam, a planetary Funpark modeled on various periods in earth history, complete with androids to provide local color. But Nuke, the Bad Guy, wants Eternam to be history, and to that end has infected its virtual reality network with a virus. Things are going haywire and only Don Jonz can set them

aright.

Traversing the countryside and zapping flying things with a handy laser is only a small part of *Eternam*'s fun. Every building you pass can be entered, and



Eternam

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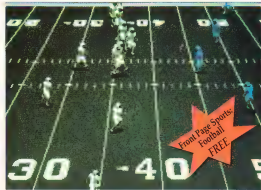


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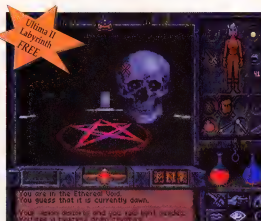
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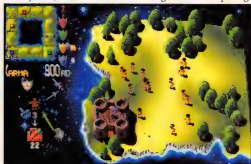
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there are people to interact with who will help you on your way and sometimes give you thankless tasks to perform. All functions—take, use, speak, etc.—are laid out on a simple icon bar along the bottom of the screen. Unfortunately, there's no mouse support, so the icons are accessed by keyboard (*Alone in the Dark* didn't have mouse support either). Other than that, the interface is friendly and the graphics and sounds terrific. *Eternam* is definitely worth checking out!

UBI SOFT

The creators of *Battle Isle*, *The Koshan Conspiracy*, *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*, *B.A.T.*, and others are no strangers to American gamers. Their latest, *Mega-LO-Mania*, is a challenger to the god-game throne virtually created by *Populous*, with a fresh look and enough twists to keep things



Mega-LO-Mania

interesting and unique. Players choose to play as four wannabe gods struggling to rule a planet, with the other three becoming the opponents for the duration of the game. The goal is to gain total control of the planet by battling these opponents on 27 islands. The islands are divided into nine



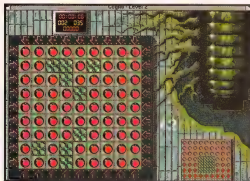
Mega-LO-Mania

Epoch, and you decide how many men will be needed to take each island. The trick is allotting just the right amount of men to each task at hand, be it combat, defense, research, or mining. Each team progresses through various levels of technology and degrees of weapons, from sticks and stones to nukes and SDI lasers.

Mega-LO-Mania has a distinct, colorful look that gives even battles a cartoonish quality, meshing nicely with the tone of the game. Opponents taunt you or ask you to become allies, and your little people run furiously around the landscape, fighting, mining, building, or just milling about. The progression of technologies provides just the right amount of variety to keep things interesting without ever becoming overly complex. All in all, it's a fun, silly game with a modicum of challenge and a fairly friendly interface. But beware—the game has no exit key, and when using a mouse you have to reboot in order to get your DOS prompt back!

KALISTO

A less prominent French developer, Kalisto, specializes in easy-to-learn coffee-break brain teasers that don't take up too much disk space. Games like *Cogito* and *The Tinies* don't win any points for originality or brilliant graphics, but those aren't key ingredients for puzzles games anyway.



Cogito

Cogito is a logic game in which a geometric figure is displayed and then mixed up. The goal is to restore the figure using arrow sliders that shift the shapes in single rows. This Windows game is a two-dimensional Rubik's Cube with a steep difficulty curve as puzzles are solved.

The Tinies are alien invaders hell-bent on getting to Earth and making things unpleasant. Your job is to get the little devils into their sleep pods before their spaceship reaches earth. At first, this is a snap: but traps, mines, and exceedingly complex configurations and numbers of tinies make things quite difficult.

DU SUBLIME AU RIDICULE IL N'Y A QU'UN PAS

Or, "from the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step." So said that most famous of Frenchmen, Napoleon, but little did he know how apt it would be in terms of computer entertainment. PC games have long walked the very fine line between the sublime and the ridiculous. Using a medium which provides increasingly elaborate games for grownups, the computer game nonetheless dwells in the worlds of childish wonder and adult complexity at the same time. And few titles have skirted that line so delicately as this new batch of French releases. With its silly visuals and sounds, *Gobliins*, for example, would seem to be suited perfectly for children, yet it's complex and engaging enough to appeal to adults. *Inca* careens back and forth across the line between the sublime and ridiculous, yet is consistently entertaining.

Why?

Partly because style—the sum total of a unique blend of sound, music, graphics, and story—carries it along, while the fantastic story appeals to a childish sense of wonder in the inexplicable mysteries of history.

What many of these games have in common is that they're not only breaking new technical and stylistic ground, but they're also out there taking chances, taking the risk of appearing ridiculous—and making us Yanks rethink the way we look at PC games.

Ultima VII

PART TWO



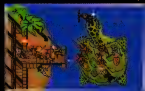
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Product Information Number 102



ALTERNATE LIVES

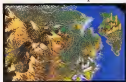
CHALLENGE OF THE FIVE REALMS: ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE GOAL

NEIL RANDALL



fortable game with plenty to offer role-playing buffs.

Challenge puts you in the role of the young Prince of Alonia. In the well-produced



introduction, you watch as your father is killed by the super-evil Grimnoth, who instructs you to surrender the crown to him before 100 days have passed. As soon as the introduction ends and you start the adventure, the screen continually reminds you of how many days have passed. The first test of a good FRP is whether or not it keeps your questing focused, and here *Challenge* is right on target: Everything you do takes time, and you soon come to resent any time that's wasted.

The second test of an FRP is how well it succeeds in making you identify with the character whose role you've assumed. Very few if any FRPs come close to doing this, because in most cases you control the actions of a whole party of adventuring heroes, rather than a single person with something important at stake. By casting you as the inexperienced prince (you can create your own char-

acter, but he's still the prince), *Challenge* forces you into identifying with him, and this is strengthened as the game progresses. At numerous places throughout the story, you interact with people who discuss your father, your mother, and your new and important role, reminding you again and again of who you are and how much you have to accomplish. It's not nearly as complex or satisfying as identifying with a good character in a novel, but here again *Challenge* moves the genre a few steps forward.

The third measure by which all FRPs are judged has

themselves known with reasonably little effort on your part; you should always know what you're supposed to be doing, or at least be aware that there are ways to find it out.

Some FRPs force you to uncover the ultimate quest as you go along; this works so long as you don't get completely bogged down in smaller tasks, and if you're willing to spend the time needed to work your way to the point of enlightenment. But designers must always be aware that some players will get frustrated if they've reached an impasse and have no clue what to do next.



to do with the degree to which the game's story unfolds in relation to your characters' actions. Simply put, you should always have the ultimate goal firmly in front of you, and intermediate goals should make

Challenge does a good job of keeping your tasks in front of you, but there are some weak points. Early in the game, the first non-player character (NPC) you talk to explains the situation and whom you should seek

The challenge in designing computer fantasy role-playing games remains unchanged: We need games with strong story lines, and complex worlds without correspondingly complex game mechanics. The history of FRPs can, in fact, be chronicled in terms of designers' efforts to achieve this goal, and even though we're still a long way from perfection, there's little doubt that we're getting closer all the time.

Challenge of the Five Realms, from MicroPlay, represents yet another step in the right direction. Although there are no groundbreaking ideas implemented in *Challenge*, it nevertheless manages, through a clever combination of features, to set itself apart from most FRPs. *Challenge* takes the best qualities from a number of different game systems, and strings them together in a plot-intensive adventure with a very friendly interface, solving some of role playing's perennial problems along the way. *Challenge* still comes nowhere close to immersing us in a virtual fantasy universe. But this is a com-

out; once you find and recruit your first party member, he lets you know what to do next. Later you'll have an opportunity to release a witch from exile, and she'll give you hints regarding the next step of your adventure. All this is extremely helpful, and for a time completely eliminates the problem of wandering from place to place, uncertain of how you should proceed. But then the direct clues become scarce and you're left,

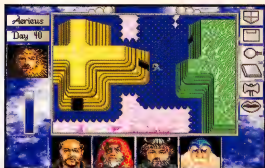
when spellcasting or combat is required. The system is intended to ease the burden of knowing the precise capabilities of each character. Furthermore, it makes interaction with the members of the party more realistic: Since you're playing as the prince and not the entire party, it's only natural that they should let you know what they're capable of doing.

The overriding quest in *Challenge of the Five Realms* is to destroy Grimnoth before his spell of darkness consumes the land. To do so, you must perform a number of duties in all the five realms of the world (hence the game's title). The first realm is Alonia, where

you'll do most of your work, but only by finding the entrances to the other four can you hope for ultimate success.

There are several locations in Alonia itself you must visit, including villages, cities, castles, and islands. In Alonia and the other realms, you'll find characters to recruit, items to use, and subquests to complete. More importantly, you'll find materials you need for the casting of difficult spells: The components for the Restoration and Slay Evil spells, the two most crucial spells in the game, are scattered across all five realms, as are the five crowns you'll need for the solution to the game.

The combat and spellcasting systems are perfect examples of MicroPlay's attempt to create an interface that augments game play rather than one that's practically a game in and of itself. As I mentioned earlier, specific components found in various locations are needed to cast spells, but *Challenge* makes it easy to see the components. And when you gather them they're fully available to the entire party, without having to divvy them up among party members. In battle, you can choose between manual or computer-controlled combat,



and for the most part placing party members under the computer's control results in sensible combat decisions.

A few tasks, though, are clumsily implemented. Chal-

lenges with NPCs difficult; once you select Hail or Threaten, you must click on the character with whom you wish to converse — not always easy to do when several NPCs are scurry-

Challenge takes the best qualities from a number of different game systems, and strings them together in a plot-intensive adventure with a very friendly interface.

lenge's point-and-click interface is meant to speed up game play, but sometimes you're forced to do needless mousing. A perfect example is when you transfer items from one character's inventory to another. First you choose a party member, open his/her backpack, pick the item you wish to transfer, then click on the character again to close that window; after that you click on the character who's going to receive the item, open his/her backup, and drop the item in it. It would be much more effi-

cient if you could simply double-click on an item and have the computer ask what you want to do with the object. The interface also makes con-

versations with NPCs difficult; once you select Hail or Threaten, you must click on the character with whom you wish to converse — not always easy to do when several NPCs are scurry-



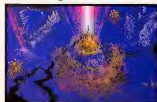
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temporarily, with no further guidance.

Of course, too much guidance is as bad as none at all, and in this regard *Challenge* does a fine balancing act. The witch



(and others) give you information about mid-sized goals, but how you go about accomplishing them is completely up to you. You'll be told, for instance, that it's crucial to lift your father's ban on sorcery, and that becomes your immediate goal. But you're not told how to get the ban lifted, and figuring it out becomes the focus of the game for a few hours.

One of *Challenge*'s nicer touches is a feature called the PAL system. Whenever you enter a situation that calls for specific expertise, the character best suited to the task will speak up (in the form of a dialogue balloon) and ask permission to perform the task in your place. One character might volunteer to haggle with a merchant, another will offer to pick locks, and a third will step forward



THE DESKTOP GENERAL

A RESOUNDING CLASH FROM SSI

WILLIAM R. TROTTER



One of the more intriguing things about *Clash*

of *Steel*, SSI's new big-scale simulation of WWII in Europe, is the fact that it is a *German* game (original title: *Jagdpanzer*). I thought war games were, if not exactly illegal in modern Germany, at least frowned upon to such an extent that anyone who designed such a program risked public stoning. Guess not.

One thing's for sure: there is no hidden pro-Axis bias in this program — I had a harder time leading the *Wehrmacht* to victory in *Clash of Steel* than I did in either of Gary Grigsby's far-more-elaborate simulations

of the same conflict. If anything, the designers seem to have bent over backward to make things difficult for players choosing the Axis side.

Here are the basics: *Clash of Steel* can be played by one or two human players. The action takes place on a map that runs from Ireland to somewhere east of the Volga, and from Scandinavia to North Africa — an area of 2500 by 2300 square miles. *Clash of Steel* is a strategic-level game in which the ground-troop icons represent army- or corps-sized units of 20,000-30,000 men (although the Germans do have a few army-group units that are ponderous to maneuver but crushingly powerful — and also serve as supply sources).

Each game turn represents two months of real time and is divided into multiple "impulses," some allocated for movement, some for replenishment, most for combat. The number and order of impulses is randomly generated. Bad weather, Soviet partisan attacks, and similar happenings also affect the impulses, providing a nice, if necessarily abstract, element of luck.

You can play the entire European campaign starting with the invasion of Poland, or you can jump in at critical periods such as the start of Operation Barbarossa or D-Day.

The graphics are nothing special, but they pull the plow. Sound effects were only partly implemented in the preview version I played, but what I heard sounded good. Considering the scale of this simulation, the interface is pleasingly logical and should present no problems even for the novice war-gamer. Indeed, *Clash of Steel* strikes me as a very good entry-level simulation for PC owners who find the war-game genre appealing, but who are not yet ready to venture into the ponderous depths of the more baroque programs. It's very easy to start playing, and reasonably easy to figure out the subtler things as you gain experience; yet *Clash of Steel* offers enough options and variants to provide considerable depth.

Take the research and development routine, for instance. Each side has ten research points which can be allocated in eight different categories. Each category has levels of progress ranging from two (panzerfausts) to nine (rockets). The more research points you allocate to a given category, the greater the chance of progress being made during a turn. One-two points yields a seven percent chance of progress; ten gives you a twenty-seven percent chance.

The catch to this system is that only the first, third, sixth,



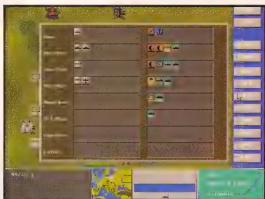
and tenth points increase the odds. I found this system arbitrary and irritating — after all, most R&D programs make progress by small increments rather than dramatic breakthroughs. Luck plays too much of a role: One player could conceivably “roll” a lucky number much more often than his opponent, no matter what the point-spread.

One way to improve your chances is to load all ten points into a technology that only has two or three levels until it reaches maximum. Once you’ve reached that technological ceiling, you can load up on the next easiest category, and so on, each time statistically improving your chances. Of course, this system assumes a reasonable amount of luck with the computer-thrown dice, and truth to tell, I had better results in some games by just using a scatter-gun approach to point distribution.

Selections for handicapping either side are interesting and realistic. For the Axis, there are toggles for chaos at OKW (High Command for the German Armed Forces), stand and die on defense rather than retreating (Hitler’s main defensive strategy), and partisan resistance (more on that later). To make things tougher for the Allies than they were historically, you can elect for Japan to invade Siberia (which would have dramatically altered Russia’s defensive options during Barbarossa); you can also choose for Germany to practice “liberation politics,” recruiting Russians from liberated areas who genuinely despised the Communist regime rather than treating them as *untermenschen*

and killing them wholesale.

Clash of Steel is unquestionably a good, solid, and highly playable war game, but I’m less enthusiastic about its accuracy as a simulation of World War Two in Europe because some of its features strike me as a little, well, peculiar. The highly abstracted naval-combat system, for instance, is clever but not very true to history: try as I might, neither my U-boats nor my pocket battleships were ever more than slightly effective, even after resetting the game parameters to give me a 25 percent advantage over the computer. The Allies hunted them down and sank them with contemptible ease no matter how many I sent out or where I placed them. Surely this cannot be realistic!



cause of the genre’s real or perceived obfuscations, this may be the game that unlocks the doors to the realm. Despite its quirks (some of which I actu-

Clash of Steel is the sort of game that’s perfect for PC owners who find war games appealing but who aren’t ready for the immensity of the more baroque programs.

Other eccentricities: Soviet partisans (whose achievements have been bloated all out of proportion by postwar mythology) seemed about three times as effective in *Clash of Steel* as they were historically; the so-called “political menu” options verge on the nonsensical, and didn’t seem to make any significant difference regardless of how much or which way I tweaked them; and the Allies display a deranged fondness for launching suicidal amphibious landings as early as the spring of 1942 if the war is going badly for them.

Still, I had a really good time flinging panzer armies hither and yon in *Clash of Steel*. If you know someone who is interested in PC war-gaming, but has been hesitating be-

ally found rather endearing), grognards in the mood for a quick-playing, easily digested game might have fun with it, too.

In my review of *Empire Deluxe* in the May/June issue, I complained that the scenario editor did not let you start a custom game at the point of your choosing. As many readers doubtless know — and as I myself discovered too late to change my copy — the new edition does indeed have such a feature; the scenario editor in *Empire Deluxe* is a much more powerful and flexible utility than its predecessor. By way of an excuse, I can only advance the usual reviewer’s whine about not having enough time to cover every aspect of a game before deadline. Which happens to be true, but which doesn’t excuse such a dumb mistake — for which I hereby stand corrected, and apologize to Messrs. Baldwin and Rakosky.



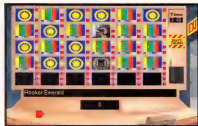
GP



THE LEARNING GAME

KIDS WILL GO APE IN THE BINARY ZOO!

LESLIE EISER



Mystery at the Museums

Education at a Rock Concert? Creative challenges in a stuffy old museum? Physics lessons in an amusement park? It's hard to believe, but newcomer **Binary Zoo** has developed not one, not two, but *three* interesting and highly educational environments. From their unusual titles — *Rock and Bach Studio*, *Mystery at the Museums*, and *Wild Science Arcade* — to their highly detailed

him blue hair, green skin, a purple shirt and green pants, and he'll inspect his new appearance before exclaiming "Cool!" Edison greets you when you sign in with any of the three programs, and reminds you that he's saved your game when you exit *Mystery at the Museums*.

Mystery at the Museums is the least of the three, which is to say that it's good, but not great. Despite an excellent isometric map of the Smithsonian buildings and glorious pictures of some of the greatest treasures housed there, the predictable storyline and repetitive combination of standard logic puzzles and memory games just don't live up to the intriguing title. Instead of exploring some of the most famous museum buildings in the world searching for historic bits and pieces of Americana, you end up playing modified versions of games like *Concentration*, *Master Mind*, and *Trivial Pursuit*.

That doesn't mean that the games themselves are boring; actually, most are very challenging. My personal favorites are a Tetris clone with dropping fabric pieces, a 3-D folded-cube game in which the goal is to spot matching patterns, and the *StackUp* game with its emphasis on spatial orientation. Since the level of difficulty is user-selectable (with a custom level

for more experienced players), there's sufficient challenge to suit a wide range of abilities.

Unfortunately, none of this makes *Mystery at the Museums* truly educational. Instead, it's more like a drill-and-practice program — except that the information isn't well known, and is never taught by the program. You often end up relying on visual clues (it's a flag with a circle on it), rather than knowledge clues (it's the flag of Japan) to pick out the right answer. Nevertheless, *Mystery at the Museums* is fun to play and may prove a worthwhile purchase, provided you want a strategy game rather than a visit to a museum.

Rock and Bach Studio and *Wild Science Arcade*, on the other hand, are clearly designed to teach as well as test. Of the two, *Rock and Bach* is probably the easiest to describe. There are six different areas to explore, each intended to provide a learning experience in a different facet of music and musical history — from rhythm patterns to harmony to classical instruments and the composers who wrote for them.

What makes *Rock and Bach* exciting for musical novices and professionals alike is the depth of exploration supported and the easygoing approach that draws kids into the learning process.



Mystery at the Museums

SVGA graphics and exceptional music and sound effects, these new releases are energetically broadening the category of educational software, and creating some very intriguing learning experiences at the same time.

The guide for all the *Binary Zoo* titles is Edison, a cute little fellow whose hair, skin color, and clothing can be customized to suit your liking. Give

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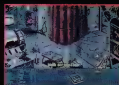
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Product Information Number 221

Each area starts off with simple information, but as you begin to explore all the available options, you quickly become immersed in the complexity of music. In the Drum Clinic, for instance, there are eight drum sets to play, each with seven distinctive patterns plus a design-your-own selection. You can even turn a keyboard into a part of the drum set and play along! Other rooms offer even more options. In the Sound Effects Room, there are 24 sounds to check out, each with a distinctive graphical signature. Add echo, reverb, or a low-

ing the right blend of musicians, you can adjust the stage lights to create just the effect you're looking for. It's a great way to practice for the Rock and Bach Studio, where you can create your own video. Making a music video can be a pretty involved process—multiple camera angles, special effects, and fancy lighting are all available—but again the designers have presented the options in a style that won't overwhelm kids with all the possibilities. Just playing with the lights is fun, but when kids begin to concentrate on creating something they'll real-



Just shooting the ball is easy enough: Place the target icon where you want the ball to go, set the power lever to any number from 1 to 16, and then click the red shot button. The ball will move in the direction you've indicated in a manner dictated by the settings of the variables. Unfortunately, the result is likely to be quite different from what you envisioned, unless you've been boning up on your physics recently.

To succeed at *Wild Science Arcade*, you must become expert at figuring out what combination of ball type, gravity, friction and power works best in a particular room. If the doors are set high on the walls, for example, maybe lowering the force of gravity and using a rubber ball will work, or perhaps you should increase the power and leave the force of gravity alone. Only by experimenting will you find the answer. To make things more tricky, Edison occasionally dashes across the screen and robs you of the ability to change variables. And more complications are added to the rooms as you move up through the game's five levels: Magnets, electrical fields, and even the occasional ball trap are obstacles that can make figuring out how to maneuver through a room delightfully difficult.

To keep you thinking physics, Professor Bludman — inventor of the *Wild Science Arcade* machine — shares a few



Wild Science Arcade

hints and other advice. But the best tip is the simplest: Don't get frustrated, and keep trying! Even with an excellent knowledge of the underlying physics, you'll need lots of practice to figure out the tricks of this addictive mind-bender. And you're guaranteed to be learning something the whole time. *Wild Science Arcade* isn't just a game — it's a lifetime obsession.

All three games have fairly high hardware requirements as far as educational software goes: a meg of RAM if you install the VGA versions, 2 megs if you opt for SVGA (the latter also requires a 512K SVGA card). All three titles support Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards (pretty much a necessity for *Rock and Bach*), but we weren't able to hear any digitized sound effects on either a Tandy Sensation or through a MediaVision ProAudio Spectrum, even though the latter is compatible with the Sound Blaster. If you're thinking of picking up one of these titles, you might want to give Binary Zoo a call to make sure your sound card is fully supported.

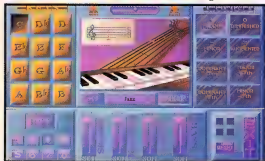
Using SVGA graphics, infectious music and sound effects, and kid-friendly interfaces, Binary Zoo is energetically broadening the category of educational software.

pass filter to investigate the effects of these simple manipulations on the sound.

For pure fun, there's the Audition Room. Kids can mix and match 16 performers, each with a unique style, to create a four-piece combo. After choos-

ize just how much there is to learn about music, and how much of that information is in *Rock and Bach*.

Despite its resemblance to a Nintendo game, *Wild Science Arcade* is one of the most sophisticated science exploration tools I've seen. The premise is simple: By manipulating only 5 simple controls — gravity, friction, ball type, direction, and power — your goal is to get a ball out of a room in a single shot.



Rock and Bach Studio

FOR THE AMIGA AND IBM PC

ROBOCOP 3D

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See Robocop 3D in action
on the Amiga and IBM PC

STRIKE COMMANDER

LEE BUCHANAN

Category: Air-Combat Simulation

Publisher: Origin

Developer: Origin

Rating: 

Take a first-rate air-combat simulation, wrap it in a rip-roaring adventure story, pack it full of stunning graphics and sounds, and you've got *Strike Commander*, the very long-awaited release from Origin that looks to push the envelope of computer gaming with an ambitious blend of action, strategy, and high-end graphics.

Created by Chris Roberts and a team of programmers, artists, musicians, and writers, *Strike Commander* brings the beauty, thrills, and pure fun of Roberts' *Wing Commander* series down to earth for some spectacular F-16 jet fighter combat. There's just one catch: *Strike Commander* is an extremely demanding piece of gaming software. Got a fast 486 with lots of RAM and 30-40 megs of hard-drive space to spare? You'll need as much machine as you can get to run *Strike Commander* in all its glory. At its highest levels of graphic detail—where the game really shines—*Strike Commander* can be sluggish on all but the fastest machines.

The box lists minimum requirements as a 386 with 4 megs of RAM, and Origin recommends a 486-33MHz with eight megs of memory. But with all the bells and whistles switched on, our 486-33 struggled to keep



Strike Commander airborne. Frame rate was very choppy, especially in dogfight sequences, and even with less-detailed graphics the game doesn't run as smoothly as we'd like to see.

OK, so you know that *Strike Commander* requires a souped-up machine to really roar. But if you can get past that hurdle, then there's a lot of game here for you. There's no other title on the market that has a flight



simulator this good combined with a crackling action story and some of the most gorgeous graphics you can find.

The setting for *Strike Commander* is sort of a worst-case scenario based on today's realities. It's 2010, and the world has gone to hell—the Soviet Union has completely disintegrated, bloody nationalism has spread throughout the world, and even the United States is falling apart. How bad is it? Alaska, California, and Texas have seceded, and citizens are fighting off armed IRS officials. Wars rage on every continent between nations and multi-national corporations, the emerging power-brokers in this twisted new world order.

That frightening future sets the stage for the rise of well-armed mercenaries, organized into dozens of groups that sell their services to governments and combatants around the

world. The plot does more than simply tie the missions together: It allows a flexibility that conventional military scenarios can't match. One week you're fighting in the Middle East, the next you're flying a strike mission over San Francisco to help bring those Californians to their knees.

At the heart of *Strike Commander* is Origin's RealSpace graphics system, which produces truly remarkable terrain graphics. Mountains, cities, farm-lands, and coastlines are stunningly rendered and seamlessly blended. When set for

maximum detail, the graphics are so good—especially when flying over a major city—that it's tempting to just admire the scenery, and it's clear that *Strike Commander* is way ahead of the competition. But at the risk of flogging a dead horse, it's worth mentioning again that success has its price. Without a really high-powered machine—a 486/50—you might not be able to enjoy the scenery and still fly the plane comfortably.

At lower levels of detail, the graphics lose some of their punch. They're still good, but are no longer clearly superior to what you'll find in other flight sims. Even so, the detail of other



objects in the game, from buildings to aircraft, is outstanding. The combat graphics are as good as any you'll find: your cannon fire chewing up an opposing plane or a missile finding its target are very convinc-



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ing. Ground attacks in particular show off *Strike Commander's* graphic might — you'll appreciate the detail of the buildings and the scorched craters left by your bombs.

The perspectives inside and outside the cockpit don't break new ground, but they are thoughtfully designed and executed. You can pan smoothly around the cockpit, and access the usual exterior views of your plane and other aircraft. *Strike Commander* also offers the view of your weapon firing and a shot of what happens when it finds its target. Other flight sims have these features, but *Strike Commander* gives you the option of automatically switching to these views when you fire. Just keep in mind that you're still flying, so don't admire your bombing run too long.

Sound effects are good but unremarkable. Weapons and explosions all make the expected sounds, though the noise from your own engine seems a bit muted. The musical score is nice, and you get a smattering of digitized speech, mainly in the introductory sequences.

While we're on the subject of digitized speech, Origin's add-on Speech Pack really brings *Strike Commander* to life. Though it requires another seven megs of space, the Speech Pack is well worth the investment. It adds speech to some of the cinematic sequences, but more importantly provides crucial info while you're in the cockpit. "Watch your six, for God's sake," warns your flight leader when an enemy gets on your tail; "Bogeys at 3 o'clock; break and attack" provides both a sense of urgency and vital information that isn't available without the add-on disk.

From the opening credits to the "The End" that appears after your untimely death, *Strike Commander* has the look and feel of a movie in which you have the starring role. The cast of supporting characters — from your fellow pilots to the shadowy "fixers" who make

the deals and sign your paychecks — is a varied lot that adds depth to the story and keeps things interesting. Cinematic sequences are attractive and informative: You need to pay attention to what's said during these interludes, because you might be commanding your unit sooner than you think.

stories and advertisements in the magazine add a touch of humor and historical perspective to the chaotic world in which *Strike Commander* is set. The levity is achieved without sacrificing the nuts and bolts of game mechanics, however; *Sudden Death* includes a separate, no-nonsense section on how to play the game.

Players who don't want an air-combat simulation diluted with a cinematic adventure might not warm to *Strike Commander*. The F-16 flight simulator here is unquestionably a good one, but if your sole interests are complete and total realism, *Falcon 3.0* might still be the best choice for you. But for players looking to add a little spice to their aerial exploits, *Strike Commander* succeeds on several

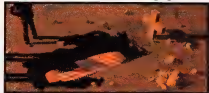


You start the game as a recruit being groomed to take over the outfit. Initially, you just go along on a couple of sorties, but soon you'll be negotiating jobs, buying weapons, and leading your mates on missions. The fiscal responsibilities with which you've been burdened add a clever twist to the game: Launch a Sidewinder, and you'll be calculating the cost as it speeds toward its target. And you might not be so eager to eject and ditch your plane when the funds for buying anew one come out of your pockets.

Documentation is excellent, with a mercenary magazine — *Sudden Death* — serving as the instruction manual. The

levels — as a flight simulator, adventure game, and to some degree a role-playing experience.

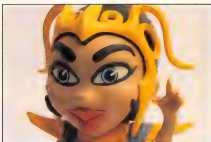
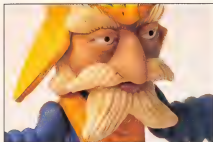
Origin is certain to catch a lot of flak for bringing a simula-



tion to market with hardware requirements bound to frustrate gamers who were positive they had a machine powerful enough to run *anything*. Oh, well, it's a safe bet that PC games aren't going to demand less from your system in the future; could it be time for that upgrade already?

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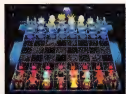
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FREDDY PHARKAS, FRONTIER PHARMACIST

STEPHEN POOLE

Category: Graphic Adventure

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

Developer: Sierra On-Line

Rating: 

It's 1888. Grover Cleveland is serving his first term, George Eastman is putting the finishing touches on the Kodak box camera, the gold standard is still going strong — and the people of Coarsegold are in big trouble. It's bad enough that the once-thriving boomtown has been going downhill ever since the gold gave out. Now some lowdown, rotten, underhanded crook has found out that the land on which these honest settlers have built their town is worth a lot more than anyone ever imagined, and is bound and determined to send everyone packing.



Many of the businessmen have already left, forced out after the Sheriff closed down their establishments on the flimsiest of pretexts. But strange as it sounds, they might be the lucky ones; if the remaining inhabitants try to stick it out, they face a series of calamities and tribulations that make the plagues of Exodus seem like a husking bee.

Okay, so flatulent horses, stampeding snails, and an epidemic of diarrhea aren't quite as bad as what Pharaoh faced. They are a lot funnier, though,

and fun is what *Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist* is all about. This is one of the few computer games that has made me laugh out loud — several times, in fact — and any game that does that automatically earns my stamp of comic approval. Designed by renowned Leisure Suit Larry creator Al Lowe and longtime sidekick Josh Mandel, it's only natural that *Freddy*



Pharkas has double helpings of puns, one-liners, and sight gags. From where this old cowpoke sits, it looks as though the boys have outdone themselves with this one.

A big part of their success lies in the premise they've chosen. When you stop and think about it, it's amazing that only now has someone based a PC game on the corny Westerns of bygone years. Most of us are familiar with the clichés and stereotypes of the genre, making it fertile soil for Lowe's trademark humor — a unique blend of Borscht-Belt sensibility and high-falutin' wise-cracks.

The game kicks off with the hilarious "Ballad of Freddy Pharkas," complete with bouncing ball for singing along. It tells the story of Freddy, the best teenage crackshot ever to walk the streets of St. Louis. But his gunslinging days came to an end when notorious outlaw and all-around bad guy Kenny the Kid challenged him to a duel, a contest that cost Freddy an ear and put him on the path to a new life: It turns

out that Freddy's lifelong desire has been to work with "pestles, not pistols, and pharmacology."

So Freddy went to school, graduated, and headed out to Coarsegold to take possession of the town's sole pharmacy. Once there, he fell head over heels for Penelope Pimm, the beautiful schoolmarm from back East. With a new career and a new love, it looks like things are looking up for the "peerless, earless" gunfighter-turned-pharmacist.

But unbeknownst to Freddy, someone has set their sights on taking over Coarsegold. As the game proper begins, we see the Dirty Sheets Hotel being boarded up, and learn that it's only the latest in a series of closures ordered by the slovenly Sheriff Shift. If Freddy doesn't find out what's at the bottom of this whole stinking mess, his dreams of helping boozy Doc Gillespie keep the hardworking townfolk in good health will be shot all to hell.

Freddy Pharkas is divided into four acts, and you must solve certain problems in each act before proceeding to the next. Game play is obviously very linear, except in Act III, where you're faced with several tasks that you can tackle in any order you please. But there's nothing inherently wrong with a linear game; in fact, some players prefer that sort of design because it means there's no way you can get deep into the game only to realize you forgot to do something way back at the start.



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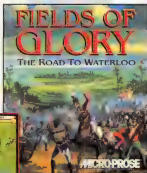
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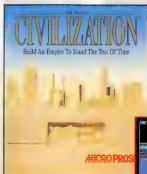
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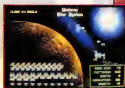
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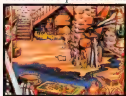
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Act I puts you to work practicing Freddy's profession, filling prescriptions for a number of townspeople, including the retiring yet beautiful Miss Primm. To assist you in your chores is *The Modern Day Book of Health and Hygiene*, a pamphlet bundled with the game which serves as both copy protection and a very funny read. Solving most of the problems in the first Act is simply a matter of carefully following the "recipes" for the various potions, but one scenario is unnecessarily difficult. Sadie Ovaree, the town Madame, has asked Doc Gillespie for something "to increase her womanly powers." But after you figure out how to read the Doc's boozy handwriting, you discover he's prescribed the



wrong medication. So you start leafing through the pamphlet in search of something that "increases womanly powers," a phrase which we understandably thought described some sort of aphrodisiac. Well, it turns out that the Doc meant to prescribe a "morning after" contraceptive — and darned if we could figure out the link between a contraceptive and an increase in womanly powers.

In Act II, Freddy's faced with several comical disasters that threaten to send all his neighbors running for the hills. A herd of flatulent fillies, a stampede of snails, and an outbreak of Montezuma's Revenge descend upon Coarsegold, and in each case only Freddy can save the day.

It's during this act that Freddy meets his faithful Indian sidekick — and I mean *Indian*, as in New Delhi and sacred cows. Srinji Lalkaka Bagdnish is stranded atop an anthill, and won't climb down for fear of harming the little critters. Rescue him, and he'll help Freddy hone his sharpshooting skills in Act III — pro-



vided you can assemble Freddy's gunfighter outfit, find his pistols, locate some bullets for the pistol, and pick up a few other items. And like any good Western, the final act is reserved for a showdown between Freddy and the bad guys — not once, not twice, but three times!

If you're one of the Al Lowe fans who thought *Leisure Suit Larry V* was too easy, you'll be happy to learn that isn't the case with *Freddy Pharkas*. In fact, this game is downright tough, and chances are that all but the most inveterate adventurers will end up calling Sierra's hint line at some point.

Sierra's point-and-click interface — with icons for walking, looking, taking and manipulating, inventory management, and game controls — is one of the best in adventure gaming. You can cycle through the different icons with right mouse-clicks, or pick one from

witty rejoinder for nearly every action you tried, no matter how goofy.

The music has a good Western flair, but after you've heard all the different atmosphere pieces you'll probably want to turn it down and concentrate more on solving puzzles, thoroughly exploring all the different scenes, and enjoying the great comedy. You can also elect to install 5 megs worth of sound effects; one of the best reasons for doing so is to hear a digitized voice squeal "Score!" whenever you do something that earns points.

The cartoonlike artwork brings all of Coarsegold's zany inhabitants to life: Freddy looks like a colorful Dudley Doright, Whittlin' Willy (who narrates the story) is the archetypal old coot, and Kenny the Kid bears an uncanny resemblance to Sierra On-Line president Ken Williams. And the rest of the cast of kooks — Mom Barker with her uppity manner, Fred with his dry jokes, Doc Gillespie with his gin blossoms, and more — are fleshed out to such a degree that you feel you almost know them. The only drawback in the artwork is the variety of



a menu bar at the top of the screen. The only change since *Larry V* is, strangely enough, a smaller inventory screen, forcing you to switch between two screens when you have more than eight items.

There's no denying that an interface this easy to use comes at the cost of some detail; it seems as though you get a generic "You just can't do that" message pretty often in *Freddy Pharkas*, while in Sierra's earlier text-based games there was a

backdrop; Coarsegold may be a small town, but 19 screens (give or take a couple) seems a little on the skimpy side.

But it's hard to get angry at a game that provides this much enjoyment — not many people or things nowadays offer the laughs you'll find here. But the humor in *Freddy Pharkas* doesn't come at the expense of challenge. Al, I gotta hand it to you — you done good.

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RINGWORLD: REVENGE OF THE PATRIARCH

GARY MEREDITH

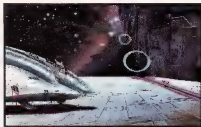
Category: Graphic Adventure

Publisher: Tsunami

Developer: Tsunami

Rating: 

The concept of a world so vast that the factors of random chance have ample room to play out all their variations has



happened to Quinn's friend Louis Wu, and Seeker's father, both members of the original expedition to Ringworld ordered by the Puppeteers, the

the planet Earth circling our sun at a distance of 93 million miles, try to envision a gigantic, inhabited metal ring hundreds of miles wide literally encircling Sol, and you have the concept

powerful yet retiring overlords of much of the universe. Along the way, the trio encounters a few — a very few — of the many creatures inhabiting Ringworld. There's also a subplot concerning Kzinti/Puppeteer animosities that helps shape the action.

The game is an extremely faithful adaptation of Niven's novel, which is both good news and bad news. The scenery, the creatures, even the gadgets are exactly as described in *Ringworld*: If you've read the book, it'll be just like coming home. Given the usual extravaganzas of game designers, I thought Tsunami might put a little flash on the General Products spaceship designs, but no — they're the same unexciting machines described in the novel. In particular, the Kzin and the Puppeteers are recreated in all their glorious details.

But the drawback to such slavish adherence to the novel can be found in the game's plotting, or more appropriately the lack thereof. I've been bothered at times by the quite inexplicable leaps in logic Niven makes in his works, and sure enough, Tsunami has also incorporated this quality into *Revenge of the Patriarch*. Why Niven allowed such lapses in

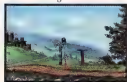


long been a staple of science fiction. Jack Chalker's *Well World* and Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld* quickly come to mind, but Larry Niven's *Ringworld* may well be the most enduring and awe-inspiring of them all.

Back in the late sixties and early seventies, Niven — heir apparent to science-fiction luminaries Asimov and Clarke — created his "Known Space" series of novels and short stories; the pinnacle of the series was the novel *Ringworld*. Instead of

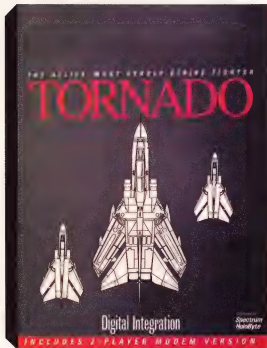
of the *Ringworld* — an area so large that anything can, and does, happen. The original novel explored a world of such rich and nearly infinite variety that ten books could not do it justice.

Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch picks up the story several years after the events of the original novel, and follows the adventures of two humans, Quinn and Miranda Rees, and a Kzin — a huge cat-like creature with the warrior philosophy of a Klingon — named Seeker-Of-Vengeance. They're out to discover what

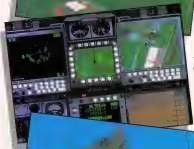


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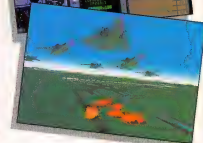
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plot, only he knows; the designers may have had to do it because of space requirements. Whatever the reason, it can be irritating at times.

Another source of potential frustration is the game's passive nature; very often *Revenge of the Patriarch* seems much more like a movie than truly interactive entertainment. There are long sequences which, once set in motion, offer no opportunity for input from the player — you're merely along for the ride, and though it's definitely a scenic ride, it's a ride nonetheless. There are, to be sure, a few puzzles to get through, but most are so simple as to have you thinking nostalgically of those old, mind-wrenching Infocom text adventures.



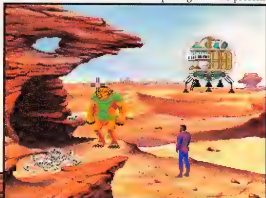
To open the force field near the settlement of the Canyon People, for example, you must accurately place five icons. Conveniently enough, four are already available, and you needn't have the deductive power of Sherlock Holmes to figure out that the medallion hanging in the shaman's chamber is the fifth icon. So let's see — there's the ladder in the Chief's room, the rope in the kitchen, the booze the Chief has been begging for back at your ship, and what else — oh yeah, the skin on the wall in the altar room with the *exact* placement for the icons.



An unfinished quality pervades much of the game. While the graphics are indeed sumptuous, there are a few glitches, as when two Mirandas show up simultaneously on-screen for a few moments. Then there's the problem with the mouse — you don't always go to the place you've clicked on. And while we're on the subject of clicking, you'll also find that some objects are very particular about *where* you can click on them. With some items, you have to click in the exact spot, down to the millimeter, or nothing will happen; others can be accessed when the cursor isn't even on them. All this

terface, for example, is a model of efficiency: Click the right button and a little icon menu appears for easy access to all commands. The sound effects fit the onscreen drama nicely, and evince high production values. And the graphics, as I mentioned earlier, are indeed a pleasure to behold: The animation of characters and vehicles is a bit choppy, even on a 486/33MHz, but the overall effect paints a marvelous picture of the Ringworld and its denizens.

A planetary structure with the area of a thousand earths is an intriguing concept for a computer game. The problem



seems to point to a game that should have spent a little more time in testing.

Before you start thinking that my entire experience with the game was negative, rest assured that *Tsunami* has included some very nice features. The in-

is that the Ringworld is a bit too complex for the confines of the PC, and that's ultimately why *Revenge of the Patriarch* comes up short. Hardcore fans of Larry Niven's universe might find much to savor; anyone simply looking for an engaging, challenging game is likely to be disappointed.

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ULTRABOTS

LEE BUCHANAN

Category: Combat Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: NovaLogic

Rating: 

Defending the Earth from alien invaders has become an almost commonplace premise for computer games, with players usually taking to the skies and beyond to defeat the evil aggressors. If you find that setting a bit tiresome, here's a change of pace — a white-knuckled combat simulation with its feet planted firmly on the ground.



NovaLogic's *Ultrabots*, distributed by Electronic Arts, puts you in control of giant robots doing battle with similar mechanical menaces bent on conquering the Earth. The action is just as furious as you've come to expect in modern air-and-space-combat simulations, with computerized offensive and defensive systems helping you call the shots. But there's another facet to *Ultrabots*: You're in charge of an entire fleet of these babies! You deploy different units for various tactical tasks, then jump into the individual Ultrabots for a bit of hands-on, robot-to-robot combat.

Ultrabots is high-tech, futuristic, and a real blast to play. The scenario is a familiar one, with a twist: Earth has been invaded by evil aliens, but this time, the aliens have chosen to fight by proxy: They've dispatched giant robots, killing machines that have laid waste to much of the planet. Conventional and nuclear weapons have barely slowed down the assault, so Earth scientists have taken damaged alien robots and refurbished them to create Ultrabots. The main difference between the alien machines and the Ultrabots is that the latter require a human crew of at least one.

As Ultrabot Commander, you direct a fleet of Ultrabots that's been given the mission of destroying enemy robots and their base camp. But your concerns aren't purely offensive; you also must protect your base camp, and the critical power network that's required for the Ultrabots to function.

Scenarios are chosen from a map of the world that indicates the location of enemy bases, their strength, and which of your forces are combat-ready. Realistically, the scenarios aren't static; while you're battling robots in one area, drastic changes may

take place in other regions, and new battle zones can appear on the map.

After choosing a scenario, you're taken to the Situation Room, where you can perform a wide array of tasks: monitor communications, shift power from the network to build re-



lays and repair damaged Ultrabots, and deploy, direct, and recall individual units. You can also view the action as seen through the eyes of any Ultrabot in the field—or jump in and take control of the robot yourself.



There are three types of Ultrabots: combat machines, cargo robots, and reconnaissance units. The Humanoid is the primary combat robot, with heavy armor and two weapon systems. The Scorpion is used for net-building; it's slow and vulnerable, but critical to the survival and expansion of the base camp. The fast Scout does just what its name suggests: cov-



ers a lot of ground in a hurry to assess enemy strength in a region. It's lightly armored and packs little firepower, but the Scout can usually outrun the opposition.



In addition to the main view screen of each Ultrabot, which shows what's directly in front of you, you can also access one of three viewing displays—terrain map, visual, and thermal camera—to track and destroy enemy robots. Both the visual and thermal camera displays can be pointed in any direction and magnified, allowing you to check your rear as necessary. The terrain map view can be used to set destinations and determine the location of the power net and friendly 'bots.

Targeting is easiest with a mouse; just put the cursor on an object and click to fire either missiles or plasma cannons. These robots didn't conquer Earth with their good looks, so you can expect to exchange quite a few rounds of fire before knocking one out. Fortunately, the Ultrabots are pretty rugged too, and you can take quite a pounding and still keep plodding along. But as the robot takes damage, weapons and computer systems tend to get knocked out quickly. An on-board system will affect repairs,

but at a very slow pace; if the damage is severe, it's best to head back to camp for refitting.

Defensive measures consist of a temporary cloaking device and an electronics pod that

ing more power to net construction widens your area of operation, but that requires sending more power to the net. If the net fails, your Ultrabots shut down and are easy prey for enemy robots.

The graphics, while not great, are certainly good enough for this type of game, and NovaLogic has done a remark-



jams the enemy's sensors. These measures will only buy you a little time, though. In Ultrabots, the best defense is de-finitely a straight-ahead attack.

Ultrabots can operate in an automatic mode, but they're restricted to a few simple maneuvers, such as laying mines, engaging the enemy, or returning to base.

Perhaps the most important decision you must make is how to allocate the power supply from the base camps, and how far to extend the net. Shift-

able job at creating the sensation of being in combat. As your robot gets hammered by enemy fire, the screen shudders and viewing screens flicker. The landscape is pretty barren, but what do you expect after decades of global warfare and nuclear holocaust? Flying missiles and explosions are attractively rendered, and the various cockpit displays are sharp and well thought-out.

Excellent sound effects are almost a given in state-of-the-art computer games, and Ultrabots delivers here as well. The crunch of the huge robot's feet gives a real sense of the size of the machine, and the sound of missiles and cannon erupting also add to the ambience.

Any simulation that's going to last more than a few weeks on your hard drive is going to require some study to learn the systems, and Ultrabots is no exception. But while there's plenty to learn, there's also plenty of strategic and tactical depth. And the ability to jump

in the heat of battle the duplication is still confusing. Is that big blue robot coming toward you controlled by an alien or a buddy? Your computer will warn you if you're targeting a friendly, but it's too bad you can't tell just by looking.

External views would be a welcome addition—just imagine the thrill of seeing your robot lumbering across the ground, flinging missiles and cannon fire and taking hits in return. As it is, you only see the robots from a distance; if you're close enough to see them in detail, someone's in trouble.

The cockpits of the Ultrabots are detailed and sufficiently complicated, but a greater variety of weapons would add much to the game. Even the powerful Humanoid robot has only two weapons, and those can get knocked out pretty quickly, rendering the machine useless.

Ultrabots succeeds as an action game, but thankfully its designers were able to link together the arcade-style battle



into each Ultrabot in the field keeps the action very intense.

There are a couple of shortcomings in Ultrabots, however, that make things a little more difficult than they should be. For one thing, all the units in the game are identical in appearance. This is consistent with the premise that Ultrabots are merely refitted alien robots, but

sequences with a plausible campaign simulation. Nova-Logic also deserves credit for creating a combat simulation that explores a distinct arena. Ultrabots won't satisfy every player, but at the very least it offers some exciting gaming on an entirely new battlefield.

EL-FISH: THE ELECTRONIC AQUARIUM

JASON R. RICH

Category: Simulation

Publisher: Maxis Software

Developer: AnimaTek

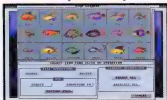
Rating: 

With Maxis Software's line of "software toys," computer users built and managed cities (*SimCity*), shaped the development of entire planets (*SimEarth*), journeyed inside an ant colony (*SimAnt*), and created strange and unusual life forms (*SimLife*). Now comes one of Maxis's most unconventional

titles yet — *El-Fish: The Electronic Aquarium*, which enables you to design and manage your own PC-based aquarium, filled with colorful and exotic tropical fish you've caught from spots around the world or developed through breeding and evolution.

As with any software toy, there are no winners, losers, or point totals in *El-Fish*. The challenge and entertainment come solely from your imagination as you design your aquarium, breed fish to yield the most colorful varieties, plopping them in the tank, and set the whole shebang in glorious motion.

You start with one of the two default fish tanks; each has already been assigned background and foreground colors, gravel type, a few plants, and a couple of objects. You can alter the colors and gravel type, and delete or replace the existing objects. Begin decorating the tank by placing new objects in the tank: gravel (48 sets in all), plants (42 species, all



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customizable in terms of height and shape), coral, miniature castles, rocks, and other stationary and animated objects are at your disposal. You can also import images created with programs like DeluxePaint, PC Paintbrush, and others.

Next, select the different species of fish you'd like to inhabit the aquarium. Using a new graphic-rendering technology designed specifically for *El-Fish* by Maxis and AnimaTek (a Russian firm that specializes in generating artificial environments), genetic algorithms are employed to produce fish that appear to swim as real fish do. The movement is startlingly lifelike, thanks to the 256 animation frames the program

creates for each fish. These fish can journey anywhere in the tank, including behind, over, or under the objects you've placed.

In addition to fish, up to eight animated objects can be placed in any tank at one time; depending on how much RAM your system has, up to 128 objects (fish, etc.) can be placed within a tank. Should you place too many fish in the tank for your computer to handle, the program will simultaneously display as many fish as possible, but when one type of fish swims off the screen a different fish will come into view. And if your computer has the bare minimum amount of memory for running *El-Fish*, you can



conserve memory by selecting smaller fish and placing only a handful in a tank.

You can obtain the fish for your aquariums in one of three ways. First, you can go fishing and catch your fish from simulated lakes and oceans around the world. The second option is

to take an existing fish from the program's database, then mutate and evolve it until you have an original lifeform. Just like real fish, these electronic fish have genes that determine their size, shape, color, behavior, and movement capabilities. These genes are inherited from parent

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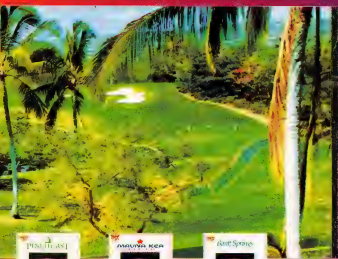


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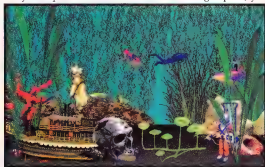
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fish but can also be altered by the user. Finally, you can breed fish electronically, by starting with two existing fish from different species. While the *El-Fish* package comes with several fish in its database, many additional fish are available to you in the form of electronic eggs (roe) which you can hatch. Once these fish are grown, you can cross-breed and/or mutate them to create many new species. The result?



The GUI interface is simple and intuitive. The Main Menu of *El-Fish* offers eight primary options, including Catch Fish, Evolve (Mutate) Fish, Breed Fish, and Fish Design. From the Tank Design option, you



A virtually unlimited variety of fish to dwell in your custom-designed tank.

El-Fish allows you to save each species of fish you've created, so you can transport new species into another tank or trade them with other *El-Fish* users. Maxis Software encourages *El-Fish* owners to trade their creations, and operates an electronic bulletin board system where users can swap their genetic masterpieces. (The Maxis BBS number is 510-254-3869, and supports up to 14,400 baud at settings of 8-N-1.)

Once you've decorated the tank and bred the fish of your dreams, the design process is complete, and you can sit back and watch the fish swim lazily around as you listen to computer-generated music. While *El-Fish* is compatible with several popular sound boards, there's a curious lack of realistic aquarium noises, such as the sound of bubbles escaping to the top of the tank or the hum of the filter. But *El-Fish's* animated graphics are highly realistic, and truly a pleasure to watch.

can Edit or View any of the default or customized tanks. There's also a Slide Show option which displays each operational tank you've created for a user-determined period of time.

Select a menu option, and you're presented with graphical libraries — various species of fish, a selection of plants, types of coral, or other objects for your tank. Because just about every option available



within *El-Fish* requires a vast number of mathematical calculations, some options (Breeding and Animating fish, for example) can take up to ten minutes to execute, depending on the type of computer you are using.

And not just any old computer will do. The minimum hardware requirements alone are stout: at least a 386/25MHz, 4 MB of RAM, 10 MB of hard-disk space, VGA or SVGA, and a mouse. To avoid interminable delays, a math co-processor is highly recommended for 386 users, and to hear music you'll need a Sound Blaster, AdLib, Covox, Roland, or 100% compatible sound card. And while you can use *El-Fish* with VGA, SVGA graphics are practically a necessity to achieve a realistic effect, and that in turn means either a 486 or a 386 with a math co-processor.

Bundled with *El-Fish* are two utilities which allow you to further customize your fish tank. MCONVERT lets you use your own MIDI files with *El-Fish*, giving you a much greater selection of background music. To add your own graphic files or scanned images to the Object Library, use the PCONVERT utility to import PCX or TIF files.

It doesn't take someone with a degree in rocket science (or should I say marine biology?) to see that *El-Fish* won't appeal to players looking for strategic challenges or fast-paced action. Once a tank is created, watching the fish swim around the tank is a purely passive activity. About all that's left to do is tweak your tank by adding new fish or objects, unless you consider feeding the fish (done with a single keystroke) an interactive element.

But *El-Fish* does what it promises: It gives you the chance to create a living environment from the ocean floor up. The graphic quality, silky animation, and high degree of user control make *El-Fish* an exceptionally original product, truly unlike anything else on the market. If you've invested in a 486 with SVGA and want to see the sort of graphics and animations your machine is capable of, *El-Fish* will certainly do the job.

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ULTIMA VII PART 2: THE SERPENT ISLE

BERNIE YEE

Category: Fantasy Role-Playing

Publisher: Origin

Developer: Origin

Rating: 

Richard Garriott, the creator of Origin's *Ultima* games, has always insisted on a new technology for each installment of his fantasy role-playing series.



When it was released a year ago, *Ultima VII: The Black Gate* represented the latest step in the evolution of one of the most popular computer FRPs of all time. It pushed the technological envelope with a full-screen world display, digitized speech, an object-oriented point-and-click interface, a game environment modeled on real-world physics, and a moral framework that brought meaning to the actions of all the characters.

Unfortunately, initial releases of *Ultima VII* came with a number of bugs which made parts of the game difficult, if not impossible, to complete, and Origin had to issue several patch disks to correct the problems. Players weren't too happy about that, nor were they thrilled at what was considered to be fairly steep hardware requirements: 21 megabytes of free hard-drive space, a sound card, 2 megs of RAM, VGA, and a 386/20. But once again

Garriot, a.k.a. Lord British, was a groundbreaker: In the year since *Ultima VII* was released, many other games have made similar hardware demands, and *Ultima VII* is still enjoying much popularity — enough popularity, in fact, to warrant the release of *Ultima VII Part 2: Serpent Isle*.

Serpent Isle places you, the Avatar, in a whole new continent, separate from Britannia (the setting for previous *Ultima* games) in more ways than one. So if the game world is entirely new, why is it called *Part Two*?

For *Ultima* veterans, the answer is clear: *Serpent Isle* is a marked refinement of the game engine used in *Ultima VII*, and in many ways is the game that *The Black Gate* should have been.

Serpent Isle takes place 18 months after you defeated the Guardian in *Ultima VII*, and 6 months after you foiled his plans again in *Ultima Underworld 2: Labyrinth of Worlds*. Your task now is to gather your companions Iolo, Shamino, and Dupre and head after Batlin, leader of the Guardian-worshipping Fellowship. You're researching for Iolo's wife, Gwenno, who journeyed to the *Serpent Isle* for exploration. It turns out that perhaps that wasn't such a great idea; Batlin and his cronies have departed Britannia for the *Serpent Isle* in order to implement the Guardian's alternate plan of conquest.

Your journey through the *Serpent Pillars* magically transports you to the *Serpent Isle*, a land different from your own in many ways but similar in one important respect — it too is in need of a hero. Interest-



ingly enough, the inhabitants of *Serpent Isle* fled Sosaria when Lord British took over back in the original *Ultima* trilogy, viewing his imposition of a strict moral code as tyrannical. Since freedom of moral choice is of utmost importance to the inhabitants of *Serpent Isle*, they see Lord British (and his champion, the Avatar) as evil. Like its predecessor, the main strength of *Serpent Isle* lies in its plots and subplots, as well as the panorama of NPCs and locations, both of which are so numerous it becomes difficult to keep track of them all.

At first blush, *Serpent Isle* seems to lack a bit of the moral complexity of *Ultima VII*, in which you needed to puzzle out the moral implications of the Guardian and the Fellowship. In their place are the cities of Monitor, Moonshade, and Fawn, and the challenge here is to unravel their unique social structures and moral codes. Beyond all the mini-quests lies the main goal — to reconcile the cosmic imbalance between Order and Chaos.

You're not allowed to an Avatar from a previous *Ultima* game, though you do come fully equipped with an arsenal of weapons from the end of *The Black Gate*; unfortunately, both your weapons and companions



are painfully teleported away in the beginning of the game by a magical storm ravaging the Serpent Isle. You'll meet up with everyone soon enough, but many of your possessions are replaced by mundane objects — your party needs to track down the owners of these items and trade them for your possessions.

As in earlier games, the Avatar is a prophesied hero on Serpent Isle (an Avatar's work is never done), a world with its share of intrigue, betrayals, and covert plots. Character interac-



tion takes place through a context-sensitive conversation system where you and each character have a range of possible responses, queries, and comments, depending on your relationship and the flow of the conversation. Your choices change as the game progresses and each branch of dialogue is distinct.

Much of the game mechanics remain identical to *The Black Gate*. With eight levels of power, spellcasting is still as complex an affair as in that game, though veterans will have no difficulty here. As in earlier Ultimas, you must have the right reagents to cast any spell. The combat system is also quite detailed and contains true strategic elements, but it takes place in real time, which can often lead to the confusing image of all your characters rushing around pell-mell.

There are different combat modes that can be set to make the best use of each party member's strengths and weaknesses, as well as take into account his or her current physi-

cal condition. Characters can be ordered to attack certain opponents, to evade, or even to protect wounded or weak party members, but I rarely relied on this feature. You'll encounter combat much earlier in *Serpent Isle* than in *Black Gate*, though neither game would be considered a hack 'n' slash fest.

The game engine for *Serpent Isle* is almost identical to the *Black Gate*, but several enhancements have been made. Though Origin claims that *Serpent Isle* plays faster than its predecessor, use of a good disk cache-like Hyper Disk is still highly recommended. Both the top-down perspective and the interface, a total point-and-click affair, remain completely unchanged — sure to make *Black Gate* veterans feel right at home, yet intuitive enough to help newcomers become quickly acclimated. Every game command can be accessed with a two-button mouse: Click on your character, and his display and vital stats appear; click on his backpack, and its contents appear.

Each display is a movable window, and all items — which,



true to the Origin philosophy, have physical characteristics like size and weight — can be dragged and dropped. The drawback here is that you expect to be able to perform actions the game won't allow, such as climbing out of windows. The full-screen view still tends to require a bit of a "pixel hunt" to discover important objects, and no distinction is



made between the dozens of keys that can accumulate in your backpack.

The character-inventory system now has a "paper doll" feature: the display of your character will actually appear to grasp, hold, wear, and wield objects, so that dragging a two-handed sword into your inventory will not just show a sword with an arrow towards your character's hand — the character actually holds the weapon with both hands.

The world around you is represented in great detail, and Origin's trademark realism shows in full force: the sun rises and sets, clouds pass overhead, lightning flashes, rain or snow falls; you can still turn on street lamps in towns after dark. NPCs carry on their lives according to the hours in the day just as you or I do, so you'll need your Avatar pocket-watch to keep track of working office hours.

In sum, Origin's game engine is state-of-the-art even today, but it still lacks a couple of features that other FRP designers have begun to utilize. In a game of *Serpent Isle*'s magnitude, the absence of a note-taking function and automapping (two features incorporated almost perfectly in *Ultima Underworld I and II*) is a real impediment to exploring the lush and

detailed game world; though Lord British has sought to provide a "realistic" and complex fantasy universe, he's failed to give us all the tools necessary to fully enjoy the experience. Little annoyances collectively irritate — for example, much of the text in the game (signposts, maps, the famous cloth map enclosed with the game, etc.) is composed in a runic code, requiring you to use the manual to decode the writing. This is simply annoying — it adds nothing to the game itself, nor does it truly serve as copy protection.

Origin has spent the time in between *Ultima VII Part 1* and *Part 2* listening to customer input, and the result is a game that's much more bug-free (though not entirely bug-free) than *Black Gate*. In an age where floppy-based games are pushing the limits of hard-disk storage — Origin's *Strike Commander* needs about 40 megs, for example — the hardware requirements for *Serpent Isle* are really no longer a critical issue.

Despite some annoyances, I enjoyed *Ultima VII Part 2* more than its predecessor; it feels like a more complete product, thanks to its well-balanced plot and superior pacing. Though not a cutting-edge game in terms of technology, *Serpent Isle*'s engrossing story is sure to draw FRP fans into a new and fascinating realm.

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WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

LESLIE MIZELL

Having exhausted every corner of the globe, nefarious Carmen Sandiego is now boldly going where no thief has gone before—into the vast expanses of outer space.

Where in Space Is Carmen Sandiego? is the latest chapter in Broderbund's wildly successful

on your suspect's dossier, but it also gives you a selection under categories such as "eyes"—not brown or blue, but two, four, or zero. The "locomotion" category offers swimming, bouncing, walking, slithering, and flying. And naturally, the 14 members of Carmen's

Category: Educational
Adventure

Publisher: Broderbund

Developer: Broderbund

Rating: 



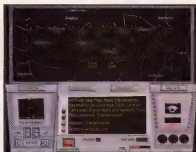
Carmen Sandiego games (*Where in the World...*, *Where in Europe...*, *Where in the U.S.A...*, *Where in Time...*, and *Where in America's Past...*). And at a time when other sequels seem to be getting stale, the intergalactic setting revitalizes this classic series—and teaches you a lot to boot.

Not much has changed in the basic setup. You're a young sleuth with the Acme Detective Agency assigned to cases in which Carmen and her larcenous band have stolen outrageous items (such as Homer's *Odyssey* from Saturn's moon, Tethys). You must solve each robbery, identify the perpetrator, and stay one step ahead by cracking clues about the crook's new destination. But while previous Carmen games have been limited by geography, *Where in Space...* is limited only by the player's imagination.

For example, the usual men and women who form Carmen's ring have been joined by androgynous aliens. This not only gives you an additional choice when filling in "gender"

motley crew have the usual pun-derful names, such as Hanover Fist, Leibsen Bounz, and Bea Miupscotti.

Of course, narrowing down your list of suspects for each crime to a single felon is only a small part of the game. You spend the majority of your



time zipping through the solar system, tracking down clues on the moons, planets, and celestial bodies. Your little Cosmohopper can take you from the sun through the Asteroid Belt and on to Charon, Pluto's moon. And if you run into Halley's Comet on the way, so much the better. As you travel to the different astral locations, you're treated to a digitized



photo. These are often amazingly detailed, down to the rocks on Venus's surface and the deep gouges on Uranus's moon Ariel. But they're often indistinguishable, too, and it's disappointing that the picture of Saturn's moon, Mimas, doesn't show its famous 10,000-meter deep "Death Star."

Players who have enjoyed the huge reference books included with earlier *Carmen*

gardless of how long you peruse the database, and you'll be amazed at the interesting facts you didn't learn in school. Not only will you be able to drop the names of unmanned space explorations into casual conversation, but also the fact that geological features on Venus are named for women such as Sacajawea and Eve.

low on time or if you still don't know where you're supposed to go after the other clues, you can go to the star map. There's no good reason for the star map — you never leave our solar system anyway — except that



games might feel ripped off by the slim *Peterson First Guides: Astronomy* bundled with *Where in Space...*. But chances are that the only time you'll open the 128-page guide is to look at the pictures. All the information you need to complete *Where in Space...* is included in the game's huge database.

In addition to a huge glossary that covers everything from "aberration" to "zodiac" you can access data on astronomers, constellations, explorations, specific planets, and other galactic subjects. Visit Mars, and you can read about the planet or either of its two moons. Information on a dozen astronauts covers Ham, the U.S. chimp from the Mercury Project; Soviet Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space; and Kathryn Sullivan, the first U.S. woman to space walk.

The database provides most of the learning and the entertainment value of *Where in Space...*. You lose no time re-



You'll amaze your friends when you tell them that Uranus's 15 moons are named after characters in Shakespeare's plays and Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock." Why hasn't Alex Trebek told us this stuff?

Another interesting feature of *Where in Space...* is also the source of the game's only real drawback. If you're running



it gives you an excuse to study the constellations. Move to the correct latitude and longitude and the constellation rotates toward you, displaying its animated outline (how *did* the ancients see some of these designs?!) before giving you another clue to pursue.

Unfortunately, there's no correct way to scroll to the correct map point, so you can end up for a long time with the cursor on the "X" key while you move from 0 degrees to 230. It's an annoyance, but not enough of one to detract from a truly entertaining program. Breaking the surly bonds of Earth has done a world of good to the *Carmen* game. Where in Space... blasts away from the orbit of history and geography, and it's sure to please fans anxious to come along for the ride.



PROTOSTAR

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

This is one of the first titles from Tsunami, a new company established by veteran game

human resistance alive; along the way, you not only battle Skeetch raiders and space pirates, but you must also attempt, through guile and diplomacy, to bring alien races over to the human side. If this plan succeeds, you may be able to disrupt Skeetch supply lines so badly that their entire scheme of conquest collapses in ruins.

Protostar offers an interesting set of variations on the stan-

designers who recently left Sierra On-Line and went into business for themselves. These guys obviously have learned their trade well, for *Protostar* is the embodiment of the professionalism that comes only from long experience, and the game augers well for Tsunami's future.

The premise is classic space opera: the ruthless Skeetch Empire has encircled the human sector of the galaxy, sealing off all interstellar contact, with the eventual aim of strangling the human economy and enslaving *homo sapiens*. Desperately short of funds, the Human Alliance activates the "Protostar" program of unrestricted covert activity, roughly analogous to the privateer schemes of 18th-century warfare. Individual Protostar com-

mand "explore, exploit, and give battle" theme. You must perform a multitude of tasks in order to have a fighting chance, but Tsunami has designed an impressively clean interface to keep things running smoothly.



manders are outfitted for dual-purpose exploration and combat, using converted merchant-class starships.

Once enlisted as a Protostar agent, you're given a minimum of resources and weaponry. By discovering and mining valuable raw materials, you supply the funds needed to keep

All basic tasks are divided into two icon-driven routines, Choose and Describe, which are accessible on all game screens; sub-routines involving resource management, navigation, combat, and diplomacy are grouped under five logical tactical icons.

Tsunami's manual gives a clear tour of the basic interface, but is strangely laconic when it comes to giving you concrete tips on how to get started and how to formulate basic strategies. Fortunately, the game is so well-designed that most of the

Category: Strategy/Resource Management

Publisher: Tsunami

Developer: Tsunami

Rating: 4.0

necessary knowledge is revealed through the act of playing. Still, it would have been helpful to include some tutorials, because it's quite possible to get started on the wrong foot



and waste a lot of time pursuing dead-end strategies.

Case in point: in the absence of any manual information to the contrary, you might assume that the best way to



start the game is to just set forth in any of direction, using the basic starting outfit you're given. If you do, you'll quickly observe that your third-class engine burns up fuel at such a rate that you can only afford to explore a handful of nearby worlds before you have to return. Fuel is very expensive, so



most of the profit you realize from these limited runs immediately goes back into the gas tank. It is possible, just barely, to bootstrap yourself into economic viability in this manner, but doing so requires a lot of tedious to-and-fro travel and nickel-and-dime transactions.

To get around this hobbling situation, try the following bold but workable strategy

It's also wise to recruit qualified crew members as soon as possible. Without a good tactical officer, for instance, your ship is a sitting duck for the first Sketch raider or space pirate who spots you (you can find this crew member at the southernmost frontier outpost). Likewise, a good navigator can be found at coordinates 066,039 (when you beam her aboard, be



(suggested by the helpful folks at Tsunami): spend *all* of your starting credits to outfit your ship with the best engines available. Fuel costs the same no matter which type of engine you're using, but the increased efficiency of the first-class engines allows you to explore and mine a big chunk of territory on your very first voyage. Those expensive engines should pay for themselves and still leave you with a tidy profit. They also allow you to outrun most of the pirate craft that attack you during planetary explorations.

Doing this requires some extra work: you'll constantly have to transfer your engines back and forth between the starship and the planetary explorer until you have enough funds to buy another set of engines, but most players will find the trade-off worth the trouble involved.

sure to retrieve the salvageable material from the wreckage of her starship).

In the Frontier economy, new lifeforms and new planets constitute valuable commodities; don't forget to collect



and register any unknown critters that cross your path, or to name any previously undiscovered worlds you locate. Naming these new discoveries, incidentally, can be a lot of fun.

The alien races have well-defined personalities; some are arrogant xenophobes, some are shy, some are downright paranoid. The running subplot that revolves around your attempt to recruit them to the human cause gives the game considerable texture.

Protostar plays very smoothly, although the time between screen redraws is somewhat lengthy on a 386/25MHz, the minimum hardware platform. (You'll also need DOS 5.0, VGA, and a hard drive; several sound cards are supported.) Combat seems to be almost wholly random, so if you save before entering each new star



system, you should be able to make slow but steady progress without having to start all over again if the Sketch bushwhack you.

There are plenty of challenges to be mastered, but the game doesn't try to outfox you with clever little tricks, or throw you into no-win situations that can negate hours of progress: It's tough, but fair.

Protostar looks like a winner: a big, captivating game graced with exceptionally rich and stylish graphics. It doesn't attempt to revolutionize a time-tested genre, but is content rather to build solidly on that genre's best traditions. Tsunami has entered the market with a game

that should attract and hold the interest of a great many gamers. We thoroughly enjoyed *Protostar*, and look forward to future Tsunami releases.

MICHAEL JORDAN IN FLIGHT

LEE BUCHANAN

If you're one of the millions of basketball fans who wanna be like Mike, here's your chance. This sequel to the *Jordan Vs. Bird* series puts you in Jordan's Nikes for a hot game of three-

ters is large and varied, and you can use substitutions to create the best matchup for each team you face, or spell players who are beginning to get winded.

You always control



on-three, a hoops variation that's becoming increasingly popular on backtops across the country.

Michael Jordan In Flight is as slick and professional as Jordan himself, with enough slams, jumpers, blocks, and steals to keep roundball fans at the controls for a long time. Not everyone will be able to adjust to the game's unique perspective, but if you're able to master it you'll find that pick-up basketball with Jordan and a host of his fictional buddies can be a load of fun.

Play controls couldn't be much simpler: Using a joystick, mouse, or the keyboard, all you do is move, shoot, pass, call for the ball, block, and steal. There are four set plays to run, but figuring out which players are doing what can be difficult; for the most part we played a free-form game, taking advantage of picks, double-teams, and mismatches whenever an opportunity arose.

Jordan's teammates and opponents are fictional, and the teams represent various non-NBA cities. The cast of charac-



ters is large and varied, and you can use substitutions to create the best matchup for each team you face, or spell players who are beginning to get winded. You always control Jordan's team, which hails from Wilmington, N.C. (Michael's home town). There are 27 players to choose from when making up your 4-man roster, so you can tailor your squad for size, quickness, or

stamina—whatever suits your style of play. Once the game begins, you have the option of controlling just Jordan, or whichever player has the ball (on defense, that means controlling the player closest to the ball). Game options include varying lengths of quarters, winner-sout, exhibition or tournament play, and three difficulty levels. Fouls include charging and a general defensive foul; you can also get called for goal-tending.

At halftime and after the game, a stats sheet pops up to show you team and individual statistics. There's also an extremely versatile replay feature, which allows you to save highlights from a wide variety of camera angles.

The graphics are outstanding, especially in the 640x400 extended VGA mode, and on a 486, the players' movements are fluid and graceful. *In Flight* will run on a 386/16Mhz, but Electronic Arts recommends a 486/33Mhz—and you'll need that sort of hardware muscle if you want to play in extended VGA mode with full-screen graphics. If the action is slow on your system, you can opt for a smaller viewing screen, with a large scoreboard taking up about a fourth of the screen.

In Flight has some fairly slick touches. Sound effects are sharp, and the designers have

Category: Sports Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Electronic Arts

Rating: 4

lightened things up with video sequences of Jordan complimenting you on a good move or, more often, chiding you for a lousy shot. "What a brick!" he says, or "Maybe you should take up golf," all in crisp digitized speech. Like most canned sequences, however, these comments lose their appeal after the first few times, and most players will toggle this feature off.

The one thing many players will undoubtedly have trouble with is the ever-shifting perspective. The "camera" constantly pans around the action at floor-level, keeping your player and the ball in sight at all times; while this approach is acceptable for watching the



game, trying to play from this perspective can be disconcerting at best. Until you grow accustomed to it, in fact, the sight of the spinning court is almost enough to induce motion sickness. And the view of the court is so tight that it's tough to tell who's guarding whom: *In Flight* is a half-court affair, and the six NBA-size players make the court seem awfully small.

Once you've gotten used to the view, though, *In Flight* can be very addictive. For a quick dose of fast-paced hoops action on your PC, *In Flight* is the top of its class.

GP

DAVID SEARS

Category: Puzzle

Publisher: Psygnosis

Developer: Destiny Software
Productions

Rating:

Psygnosis obviously knows a good theme when it sees one. Right on the heels of *Lemmings* 2 comes *Creepers*, by way of Canadian-based Destiny Software Productions. In *Creepers*, the caterpillar corps steps in to replace the rodent regiment, but the ultimate mission is much the same as in the critically



acclaimed *Lemmings*: maneuver cute lil' guys to safety across a screen full of deadly pitfalls before time runs out.

As an endangered species, the creepers need your assistance to ensure their survival. You must guide a specific number of creepers into the special pupation pot on each screen. Fill the pot with the required number of creepers, and they'll fly away in their butterfly forms, signalling the end of the level.

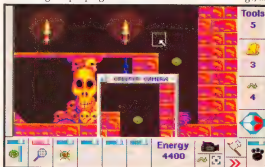
To move the creepers into the pot, you use a number of tools accessed via a menu bar at the bottom of the screen. The types of available tools vary from level to level, but generally you can expect to have access to girders, swatters, trampolines, or fans. Just click on one of the easily identifiable icons, then position the cursor

over an on-screen location and click again. Once in place, a tool affects creepers that approach it: the trampoline bounces creepers into the air, the fan blows them backward and up hills, and the girders make excellent bridges over chasms. The swatter tool behaves a bit



differently, allowing you to knock creepers violently around the screen every time you click on them.

An interesting addition to the standard game controls is the Creeper Peeper, which activates a movable camera window that tracks creepers; a Static Creeper Peeper works in much the same manner, but instead of tracking creepers allows you to choose any location within a level to set up a camera. Both these options prove useful in monitoring creeper progress.



The artwork in *Creepers* emulates much of the graphical cuteness that made *Lemmings* so adorable, but the bottom line is that these fellows are green worms — and worms don't have any cuddly fur, nor do they wear baggy smocks. Creepers aren't the least an-



thropomorphic, and I, for one, would like to see a goosy splat when they fall off a precipice; instead, they roll into a protective ball and bounce around.

One of the things that makes the stars of *Lemmings* so endearing is the way some can perform certain tasks. You can change the abilities of lemmings, making them climb obstacles, dig holes, build bridges, and so on. Working with the creepers is a bit more limiting, in that you can only put tools in their paths or swat them around the screen. Creepers have little personality and even less intelligence, so they really aren't much fun to watch.

Some of the many dozens of levels in *Creepers* seem too maddening for a gamer of average patience to solve, while others require almost no time at all. As a puzzle game, *Creepers* seems an uneven challenge; as

an arcade game, it moves at an inchworm's pace. Most players will find that they can fill an afternoon or two rescuing arthropods, but only puzzle fanatics will stick with *Creepers* for the long haul.

THE 7TH GUEST

T. LIAM McDONALD

There's one rule for any hotly anticipated, long-delayed, overhyped game: it will never be good enough. Ever. It's the High Expectations Trap: Origin fell into it with *Strike Commander*, MicroProse fell hard into it with *Darklands*, andSSI is about to fall into it with *DarkSun*.

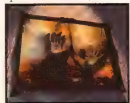
Stauf and his house are enigmas. The guests are all dead, and we see them only as ghosts in fleeting scenes. As you travel about the house (two stories, an attic, and a basement), you see these desperate people living out their last moments. None of the scenes are in chro-

nological order, and the story of what really happened to them and the seventh guest must be pieced together from these fragments.

Game play in *The 7th Guest* consists of a series of classic puzzles built into the structure of the house itself; solving them opens new rooms and triggers new scenes. There's no icon bar to click on to perform different actions, no in-

ventory stuffed with an unbelievable number of items. Instead, all actions are performed with a single pointing device, which changes appearance to indicate what actions you can perform: a skull with an exposed, pulsating brain represents a puzzle to be solved, a skeletal hand with an extended finger means you can enter a room, and chattering teeth lead to other scenes and visual tricks.

For many, this is the problem with *The 7th Guest*. While the puzzles fit the context of the story and are cleverly incorporated into the structure of the house, they simply aren't dynamically linked to the narrative. Solving them merely opens locked doors, and the



Category: Puzzle Game

Publisher: Virgin

Developer: Trilobyte

Rating: 4.0

actual story, with its complexities and enigmas, never becomes part of the play. Still, the puzzles are wonderfully presented, with stunning 3-D graphics and a satisfying variety of difficulties.

Gamers expecting the ultimate adventure game are the ones who will be most disappointed in *The 7th Guest*. There's no object manipulation or character interaction; rather, *The 7th Guest* is an interactive experience, with delights to be



found in every corner. A dense soundtrack, gorgeous, heart-stopping graphics, and the most extensive use of full-motion video in any game to date all serve to make *The 7th Guest* a chilling, exhilarating gaming experience. Yes, it could have been more, and this is part of the disappointment. But CD-ROM software is in its nascent stages, and if its first steps are tentative and halting at times, they are at least steps on the path to the next level of interactive entertainment. *The 7th Guest* is blazing a new trail: It's a rough one at times, but one which any owner of a CD-ROM must traverse.

GP

Now Virgin and Trilobyte have fallen into it. Thanks to tantalizing sneak peeks and a tidal wave of publicity, *The 7th Guest* had to look like a movie, sound like a CD, play like no game ever had before, and do your dishes and laundry in order to fulfill everyone's expectations.

Of course, it didn't do all that. So what does it do?

It changes the standard for technical quality in computer games. It is the new benchmark against which all other games will be measured. It will show people just what games can be. It is new, different, and daring. It is also seriously — to some people, fatally — flawed.

The 7th Guest is a first-person, widescreen horror game that takes place entirely inside the creepy mansion of petty-thief-turned-millionaire-toymaker Henry Stauf. It's sometime in the 1920s, and Stauf has secluded himself following a mysterious epidemic that is killing children, an epidemic that may be somehow linked to his toys. Finally breaking his silence, he invites seven guests to his mansion, offering them fulfillment of their deepest desires. During the introduction, we meet six of the guests; the identity of the seventh guest, however, is a mystery.

SPACE HULK

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Category: Combat Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Games Workshop

Rating: 

This is one terrific game: a fast, challenging simulation of bone-crunching squad-level combat. You take command of the Terminator Space Marines of the Human Imperium against the deadly hell-spawned alien Genestealers, who use drifting abandoned spacecraft as hatcheries for their broods. *Space Hulk* is based, lovingly and with great understanding of the full potential of the PC, on the popular Warhammer board game series.

You command a squad (two squads in some of the more difficult scenarios) of powerfully armed Terminators, controlling all five warriors via a monitor system similar to the one in the movie *Aliens*. When the action gets hot, you can take control of a selected squad member, moving him and firing his weapons. But while



you're in that mode, you can only watch in horror if another squad member is jumped by a Genestealer.

There are a number of innovative features in *Space Hulk*. Rather than pausing the game (which takes you to a static graphic image), you use "freeze time," which enables you to

catch your breath, examine the tactical planning screen, and plot your next series of orders. The catch (and it's a sadistic one) is that "freeze time" comes only in limited amounts, and is only partially replenished during the course of real-time play. You'll find yourself hanging on to those remaining "freeze time" seconds like a basketball coach hoarding his last time-out in a championship game.

Graphically, *Space Hulk* is a triumph of realism and mood. The deserted hulk corridors are truly dark, sinister, claustrophobic places — water drips into stagnant pools, and loose wiring writhes and arcs, sputtering, at your feet. Even though you have a scanner, it only shows the area immediately around you; a Genestealer can cover that distance in five seconds, giving you little time to turn and fire. You have some potent weapons (with resounding names like Thunder Hammer and Storm Bolter), but the enemy is fast, numerous, heavily armored, and designed by millennia of evolution to be a perfect killing machine.

Combat is gloriously bloody — gores spurts, chitinous appendages fly, and your fellow Terminators get dismembered before your eyes. It's quite possible to get sucked into the game's *gestalt* to an almost frightening degree. Example: I got stuck on one mission for an entire morning, always getting massacred even though I was killing more and more Genestealers with each try. After an hour of repeatedly jumping into the fray, I had worked myself into a real bloodlust, growling and cursing, sweating and twitching, burning with the desire to continue until I had finally seen my foes reduced to bloody puddles.



The use of sound in *Space Hulk* is brilliant. Voiceovers are convincing, and — believe it or not — the gratuitous rock song that accompanies the opening credits is actually good enough to stand on its own. Digitized sound effects add another layer of atmosphere: As you move through a ship you hear dripping water, sparking wires, echoing footsteps, and the ominous growls of prowling aliens, which seem to come from all around you.

Having praised *Space Hulk* as perhaps the sharpest and most innovative sci-fi combat game anyone's ever come up with, I must close with a word of caution: Players with a low frustration level should try before they buy. *Space Hulk* is not only the best of its genre, it's also one of the hardest. The planning and command interface works well enough for one or two Terminators, but given the speed with which dangerous situations occur in the more complicated missions, successfully controlling an entire squad can be extremely difficult.

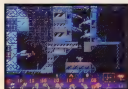
On the other hand, if command in *Space Hulk* were easier, EA would probably get raked over the coals for not making the game challenging enough. And I must admit that the game was so exciting that I kept playing even when I was getting slaughtered repeatedly. Gamers craving a solid tactical exercise punctuated with high-powered, futuristic mayhem will love *Space Hulk*.

GP

LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES

SELBY BATEMAN

Those delightful but dense lemmings are back again — walking off cliffs, getting trapped in holes, drowning, falling into bottomless pits, and generally acting like the idiots they are.



As with *Lemmings* and *Oh, No! More Lemmings*, you've got to help save as many of them as possible by bestowing skills on individual lemmings at just the right time. But this time round there's a quasi-plot: You must help the 12 tribes of Lemming Island find and unite the pieces of a talisman that will help the lemmings escape the approaching darkness that dooms their land. And you do that by getting as many Lemmings safely through each puzzle screen as possible.

Initially, *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* is a little intimidating, even for fans of the original *Lemmings* and the sequel. There are 60 — yes, 60 — different skills that you can give to lemmings to help them on their way! How can you know which combina-

skills — usually from three to eight — so things aren't nearly as bewildering as they might appear at first. In fact, one of the pleasures of this new game is that the Practice option lets you play around with any of the 60 skills in four of the 12 tribal areas.

Six different categories of skills are available — eight wind skills, eleven ground-removing skills, seven building skills, six shooting skills, ten movement skills, and ten miscellaneous skills. And the news skills are a lot of fun: jet pack, balloon, fencer, laser blaster, sand pourer, planter, spearer, kayaker, pole vaulter, and many more.

One of the most popular aspects of the *Lemmings* series has been its sense of humor, and that is even more in evidence with *Lemmings 2*. The characters are as cute as ever, and the screens are full of fun and whimsy. There's even a small paperback book included that tells the comical story of the 12 tribes.

The different tribes that inhabit the island have their own distinct worlds: Circus, Classical, Medieval, Outdoor, Egyptian, BeachBum, Sports, Shadow, Cave, Space, Polar, and Highlands. Each world has its own set of graphics appropriate to the theme of the individual tribe, and each has its own unique challenges.

For those who thrive on puzzles — and especially for gamers who enjoyed the previous *Lemmings* titles — *Lemmings 2* is going to be a real treat. The puzzles are bigger and generally more complex than the earlier games. For example, many of the screens scroll vertically and diagonally as well as horizontally. It's a bit disorienting, and requires more study than earlier games: You'll

Category: Puzzle Game

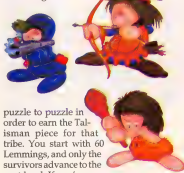
Publisher: Psygnosis

Developer: DMA Design

Rating: 

need to hit the Pause button at the start of each level just to get your bearings.

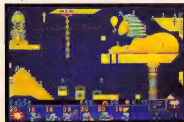
There are also a few changes to your game goals as well. Your overall objective is to unite the pieces of the Talisman, and to do that successfully, you've got to get a certain number of Lemmings from



puzzle to puzzle in order to earn the Talisman piece for that tribe. You start with 60 Lemmings, and only the survivors advance to the next level. If you're very, very good, and are able to get all 60 Lemmings through all ten levels for a tribe, then your Talisman piece will be gold. Less successful efforts result in silver or bronze pieces. You'll always aim for the gold, but don't get disappointed if you fail — even earning a silver or bronze talisman will be tough sledding.

Lemmings 2 does something that sequels (including *Oh, No! More Lemmings*) very often fail to do: It takes the initial concept to a higher level. The humor remains fresh, and the game gives all us *Lemmings* addicts hope for even more Lemming-saving activity in the future.

GP



tions of skills to choose, let alone which order to use them?

No problem. Thanks to a Practice option and a good walk-through of a few levels, you'll quickly get the hang of things. For each puzzle screen, you're assigned just a few of the

LA LAW: THE COMPUTER GAME

JEFF SEIKEN

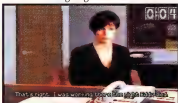
Category: Graphic Adventure

Publisher: Capstone

Developer: Capstone

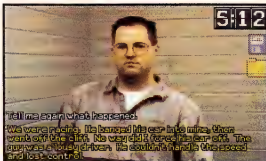
Rating: 

D eclining ratings may have put the future of "LA Law" in jeopardy, but even if NBC does pull the plug on the acclaimed series, this adventure game will serve as a keepsake for fans. Sadly, the game has a difficult time making its case as an intriguing courtroom simulation.



In the desktop version of *LA Law*, you play the part of an ambitious associate who's just joined the McKenzie-Brackman law firm. Your goal is to win the eight cases assigned to your care and ascend to the heights of senior partner.

Each case proceeds in two stages. The preparation phase is when you do your legal legwork, gathering evidence to support your client's position. This typically involves interviewing witnesses, gathering relevant documents, and researching the background of the case. If stymied, you can also consult with the other attorneys in the firm for a nudge in the right direction. You're generally working under an extremely tight timetable, but luckily you can save a game at any point during a case, allowing you to try different approaches without being forced to start over if you've chosen a dead-end approach.



Once the preliminaries are over, the case goes to trial. What transpires in the courtroom largely depends on the information you turned up during the preparation phase, although occasionally a key piece of evidence will be revealed during the proceedings. This sequence is only partly interactive: you can question people on the stand, raise objections, and even request a mistrial, but the program decides which witnesses you can call to testify or ask to cross-examine.

I have no idea how much money Capstone laid out for the license for *LA Law*, but after spending a few days in court with it, I'd dare say that a bigger hunk of the company's resources went into acquiring the title than developing the game. The graphics alone are grounds for dismissal: Most of the game screens consist of fuzzy, digi-

less, static feel — this is definitely not the stuff of compelling drama.

Apart from your firm's offices and the courtroom, the only other locations you can visit are the opposing counsel's office and the police station. That won't cramp your legal style too much, though, because most of your important work during the preparation phase is conducted over the phone.

The cases themselves are challenging, but whatever mystery they present tends to unravel quickly once you latch onto the correct thread of inquiry. They also lack any moral dimension, or even much connection to points of law. Instead, most of the game revolves around uncovering the hidden pieces of evidence that will exonerate your client and reveal the real guilty party — a plot summary that sounds closer to



tized still photos taken from the show, many of which are recycled endlessly throughout the game. The lack of variety in the artwork gives the game a life-

"Magnum P.I." than "LA Law."

The verdict: good show, disappointing game.

GP

WORLD TOUR TENNIS

LEE BUCHANAN

Tennis has been the subject of computer games since early "pong" games flickered on television screens years ago, but there are surprisingly few tennis simulations on the market, and none really re-creates the sport effectively. Electronic



Arts' *World Tour Tennis* (WTT) looks to shake up the rankings with a game that puts you on the court with a unique first-person perspective.

Despite some rather uninspired polygon graphics, WTT serves up a playable, persuasive game of tennis. Features include a schedule of tournaments, player rankings, practice drills, and a variety of playing surfaces. But what sets this sim apart from its competition is its first-person perspective. You don't see your player; you view the action through his eyes. Instead of seeing a 100-mph serve blazing toward an on-screen character, you see it coming right at you.

This point of view takes some getting used to — and it might hamper shot-making just



a bit — but WTT succeeds in create the sensation of playing tennis. You can also play from an oblique overhead perspective, but the game becomes rather ordinary in that mode because the polygon-based players don't help you suspend your disbelief.

Other tennis games may look better, but none reproduce the feeling and pace of tennis like WTT. It just feels right — you can come to the net behind your serve and knock off a winning volley, or rip a passing shot by the opponent who's trying to do the same. There's an uncanny realism involved in timing your shots and determining the proper angles, and this is the most satisfying aspect of WTT.

The first-person perspective has a few drawbacks, the biggest being that it precludes a two-player game. And sometimes it's hard to tell just where you are on the court, whether you're just behind the baseline or just inside of it. But that awkwardness is quickly forgotten when you get into a furious rally.

WTT comes with 96 ranked male players, all with their own areas of expertise. Some have big serves, while others are content to get the ball in play; some are baseline players, some prefer a serve-and-volley game. The computer opponents have a wide range of strategies, and you must adapt your game to meet the challenge of their various styles.

Using one of the computer players or creating a player from scratch, you can practice specific shots, play exhibition matches, or enter a single tournament; you can start a career only with a player you've created. To create a player, you choose his name, set height and weight, then allot points in three skill areas — speed, acceleration, and endurance — which can be improved through practice and competition. The career mode is played out with weekly tournaments; these vary greatly in prestige and prize money, and you often must choose from two or three a week. As your skill improves, you'll see yourself rise in the rankings and your bank

Category: Sports Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Electronic Arts

Rating: E

account swell.

The first-person view, along with the realistic movement and play of the computer opponents, are satisfying enough to overcome the



game's glaring weakness — sparse, dull graphics. The polygon graphics that allow the players' fluid movements just aren't much to look at. The figures move like real people, but they look more like crude cartoons than humans. And in the first-person perspective, all you see is the judge in his chair and an empty grandstand — no ball boys, no signs, nothing.

Sound effects are minimal — just the sound of the ball bouncing and an occasional grunt from your opponent. Here again, WTT would have benefited from better production values. If there were a crowd in the stadium, it'd be nice to hear some "oohs" and "aahs" after a great shot.

I'd like to see this game reworked with livelier graphics and sound, as well as the inclusion of female players. The unique perspective and player animations alone make *World Tennis Tour* worthy of a followup; with the proper refinements, it could become the world's top-ranked tennis simulation.

GP

POINT OF ATTACK

JEFF SEIKEN

Category: War Game

Publisher: HPS Simulations

Developer: HPS Simulations

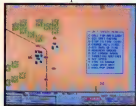
Rating:



Once in danger of withering on the vine, computer war games appear to be back in full bloom. New titles are sprouting up all over the place, and not just from bigwigs like Three-Sixty andSSI. Last year, Colorado Computer Creations turned quite a few heads with its audacious re-creation of World War II in Europe, *High Command*. This year, HPS Simulations hopes to enjoy similar success with *Point of Attack* (POA), a game of tactical combat in the modern Middle East.

Home-grown designs of this sort succeed because war-gamers will tolerate minimal production values—as long as the game doesn't skimp on the simulation side of things. In fact, that sums up the pros and cons of *Point of Attack* rather nicely.

From an aesthetic point-of-view, the game's humble origins are clear to see. The EGA graphics, internal



speaker sound effects, and keyboard-only interface will evoke instant déjà vu for players who cut their teeth on one of SSI's 8-bit war games from the 1980s. But beneath the game's primitive surface lurks a simulation of some subtlety and sophistication. POA was designed by an ex-army officer, and after spending a few hours with the game, it soon becomes obvious that he knows his business.

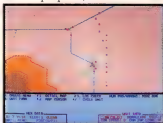
In POA, turns represent

one minute of real time, and hexes equal 200 meters. These points are worth mentioning because they highlight what might be called the game's central conceit: on the modern battlefield, fire predominates over movement. At this time frame and map scale, maneuvers take considerable time to unfold; even a tank platoon racing at high speed across open ground won't cover more than two or three hexes a turn.

But if units seem to scuttle across the map in slow motion, firefights erupt with a dizzying and deadly fury. That same tank platoon can, in the same 60 seconds, pump out 24 rounds, laying waste to anything within range. Combat in the game has the aura of a boxing match in which either fighter is liable to be knocked out by a single punch. For players, the implications are clear: your primary mission as commander is to get the right units in the right place before the shooting starts.

Except for the awkwardness of the keyboard interface, POA plays easily. At the player's discretion, the most complex part of the game—the combat mechanics—can be handled entirely by the computer through default targeting instructions. On the other hand, if you hope to make intelligent use of your forces, then there's a lot of information that needs to be absorbed. The manual (including designer notes and appendices) runs over 80 pages and, though well-written, is somewhat opaque in places. For instance, it took several readings plus some experimentation with the game before I fully grasped the relationship between vehicle speed, the map scale, and the numbers listed on the Terrain Chart. Fetting out vehicle and weapons specs can also be a chore.

POA comes with five scenarios, including the obligatory Desert Storm shoot-out, as well as a design-your-own option that adds to the game's replay value immensely. The manual actually recommends the Gulf War scenario for introductory purposes, but newcomers



might be better advised to bypass it in favor of one of the others: besides being a complete cakewalk for the Americans, the Desert Storm scenario is made even more boring because the wide-open nature of the terrain leads to tiresome pauses during the sighting checks.

Even with better graphics and an improved interface, POA would still appeal to a fairly limited audience. The program is too numbers-oriented and the pacing too methodical to attract casual gamers, and a healthy interest in the subject is pretty much a prerequisite. Ironically, the recent fallout over *Patriot*, Three-Sixty's entry in the Desert Storm sweepstakes, may actually work to HPS's favor, as the company might very well catch some dissatisfied customers on the rebound.

However popular POA proves to be, though, the mere fact that it exists spells good news for historical simulation fans. War games like this one (and *High Command* before it) feed the creative ferment necessary to keep the genre flourishing. *Point of Attack* is the latest sign that it's truly springtime for war-gamers.

GP

PEPPER'S ADVENTURES IN TIME

LESLIE EISER

Sierra On-Line must be pretty confident that you and your kids will love the Discovery Series of games — they all come with a money-back guarantee. Chances are good there won't be many refunds for *Pepper's Adventures in Time*, though, because this adventure is thoroughly enjoyable from start to finish. And the historical slant means it's fairly educational — especially if you like your education wrapped in a wacky story.

often means picking up objects and returning them to their rightful owners, a task complicated by layers of deceit, some rather disgusting bullies, and a lot of well-hidden clues. Fortunately, she has Lockjaw to help her — and you to help Lockjaw. If you can just get him to stop biting people and concentrate on the task at hand, you might have a chance to set things right.

Sierra's trademark point-and-click interface makes exploring colonial Philadelphia a snap. Most of the icons — legs for walking, hands for grasping and manipulating objects, eyes for examining items, and so on — are old friends from other Sierra games, but the Truth tool is a new addition. Use

this icon to quickly tell the difference between historical accuracy and the totally rad anachronisms Uncle Fred has introduced. Do hippies belong in 1776? The Truth tool will tell you that hippies didn't appear until the 20th century. What about potholes? A quick click and you'll discover that there were potholes back then — big ones even.

There are some other welcome modifications to the traditional Sierra adventure-game design. Perhaps the most obvious change is in the game layout itself. Most Sierra adventures are linear — you solve one puzzle after another until you reach the "end" of the story. But in *Pepper*, instead of a long series of interconnected puzzles, there are six distinct acts to complete. You needn't finish all the

puzzles in one act before beginning the next, nor do you need to play the acts in a specific order. Youngsters can easily jump from one scene to another if they get frustrated, figure out earlier solutions, or just feel the need to work

Category: Educational Adventure

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

Developer: Sierra On-Line

Rating: 

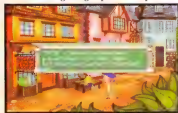
on a different task. Goals clearly stated at the start of each act help keep kids stay focused and on track.

Some distinctly educational aspects — like the quizzes conducted by Ben Franklin at the end of each act — make *Pepper* appealing not only to young users, but also to the adults peering over their shoulders. One of the nicest examples of educational content is the Proverb game played with "Old Richard." A series of eight adages must be delivered to the



The red-headed Pepper, a young girl with a wry sense of humor and a sophisticated vocabulary, is the lively heroine. She and her unruly dog Lockjaw are propelled back in time to unscramble the mess that Pepper's mad Uncle Fred has created. It seems that he's decided to shoot Ben Franklin full of the "good times" feelings of the Sixties — without that era's sense of social consciousness. Now all Ben wants to do is relax in his hot tub and let his karma flow. Uncle Fred figures that without Franklin's leadership, the colonies will never win the war with Britain, making them an easy target for his intended takeover in 1993.

To sort things out, Pepper must disguise herself as a young boy, figure out what's askew, and start fixing things up. This



appropriate malcontent. To help youngsters appreciate the meaning of expressions such as "Eat not to dullness, drink not to elevation," additional explanations in everyday English are provided. There's also a glossary that can be quickly consulted when colonists use terms like "frugality" or "beseech."

A wonderful amalgam of historical trivia, political commentary, and off-the-wall humor, *Pepper's Adventures in Time* is great fun to play, nice to look at, and a pleasure to hear. The adventure format will keep your kids happily playing, unaware that they're soaking up history and trivia. Good job, Sierra!

GP

MAELSTROM

BERNIE YEE

Category: Strategy/Resource

Management

Publisher: Merit

Developer: Don Bluth Multimedia

Rating: 

Maelstrom may seem like just the latest in a long line of "build a galactic empire" games, but it incorporates some interesting twists — not surprising, since the game's designer, Syd Mead, was involved in creating the futuristic worlds of *Blade Runner* and *Tron*.

In *Maelstrom*, you're a defector from a conquering military force — known as the Syndicate — who has chosen to adopt the peaceful mining world of Harmony as home. The government of Harmony, recognizing the tactical skills you've acquired by crushing other civilizations, has appointed you Overlord. It's your duty to make decisions regarding political, economic, and military development that will enable the planet to rise up and crush its would-be oppressors.



Although this scenario sounds rather familiar, it is mixed with some unorthodox implementation. The universe is populated with a large number of different individuals with whom you can interact. The game itself begins — and stays at — your "holodesk," where you can contact various individuals in your government and other worlds, and implement

intelligence directives and military initiatives. As Overlord, research and development are at your disposal, and you can build ships to carry your lethal discoveries to your enemy.

But the real fun comes in interacting with the other personalities in the *Maelstrom* universe. Here, the game departs from the route taken in the strategy classic *Civilization*, allowing you to exercise — albeit in a primitive fashion — diplomacy. Supposedly there are hundreds of individuals with whom you can speak, all with their own personalities and motives. Although the menu-driven interaction is relatively simple, the sheer number of individuals you can contact conveys the sense you must delicately skate the galactic ice among different factions. NPC interaction is somewhat limited in that you don't have real choices in a conversation, but you can respond with actions, such as sending an armada to aid a beleaguered ally.

And NPC interaction aside, strategy is literally the name of the game. A good spacefaring Machiavelli must realize in this time of crisis for Harmony, many individuals stand ready to give you their lives, but others would be happy to see you fail — or die. Intelligence units can provide you with crucial information for nipping sedition in the bud, or for aiding potential allies.

Your other resources — mining, R&D, military, and more — are equally complex and detailed. No game of galactic conquest would be complete without letting you purchase an extensive array of starships, weapons, defensive systems, and other gadgets, and *Maelstrom* offers enough to keep a sci-fi fan tickled pink. But while you're busy building your galactic empire by thumbing through the latest weapons catalogs, other external factors



come into play — for example, leaders of other worlds may ask your help in locating a kidnapped scientist or repelling a Syndicate attack, while others may seek to overrun Harmony. You must respond to all these emergencies in a timely fashion.

Information files, commands, dossiers, and resource allocation can all be accessed at your holodesk, but efficiently juggling these various options, not to mention moving smoothly between them, is a must: The game progresses in



real time, and while you're busy pointing and clicking the Syndicate grinds on toward your planet. The mark of a good strategy game is the various ways resources can be used to achieve your ends, and *Maelstrom* scores high marks in this regard, giving you many resources to allocate and leaving the decision-making up to you.

Maelstrom proves to be a little frustrating for those gamers looking to quickly dive into the tempting universe of the game. But if you're willing to invest some time reading the manual and experimenting with the game system, *Maelstrom* will reward you with a solid strategy game seasoned with a satisfying measure of galactic drama.

LIBERTY OR DEATH

JEFF SEIKEN

The Japanese company Koei established a foothold in the U.S. market with its distinctive series of strategy games re-creating distant epochs in Oriental history. With *Liberty or Death* (LOD), its first game developed in this country, Koei has rather appropriately turned to a subject close to home for American gamers: the Revolutionary War.

Despite the shift in setting and era, *Liberty or Death's* ancestry should be readily apparent to anyone who has played one of Koei's earlier products. It features, for instance, the usual combination of area movement and a tactical combat subgame for resolving battles. Many other concepts have been borrowed, too, such as the use of "body points" to determine each leader's ability to perform different tasks.

In continually cribbing from the same basic game system, Koei could be accused — with some justification — of turning into a one-trick pony. Gamers have every right to be skeptical about whether a design originally developed to simulate medieval warfare in Japan and China can adapt to the circumstances of the Ameri-

aged carefully, regiments may disband and officers resign their commissions (or even desert to the other side). Especially for the Americans, the fickle loyalties of one's own troops often pose a graver threat to victory than the enemy. Random disasters like smallpox epidemics and freezing winter storms can also decimate the ranks. All of these events have parallels in



the actual history of the war.

Of course, almost everything in the preceding paragraph could just as easily have been said about previous Koei titles. But *LOD* adds a number of original touches to reflect some of the unique dimensions of the struggle. For instance, Tory and colonial militia units in the game will spring up of their own accord when their home states are threatened, but remain outside of the player's control unless recruited to his side. In practice, this means that militia is useful as a first line of defense, but players will have a devil of a time cajoling these regiments into joining any offensive ventures.

The biggest difference between *LOD* and its predecessors, however, lies in the overall thrust of play. Unlike other Koei games, territorial expansion is not the player's main objective, for the simple reason that there are no resources or economic benefits to be gained from seizing enemy districts (as the British generals learned to their misfortune during the real war). Instead, the game requires you to concentrate on crushing the opposing army in the field. Such is the brutal nature of revo-

Category: Strategic Simulation

Publisher: Koei

Developer: Koei

Rating: 

lutionary warfare, and *LOD* conveys this truth with perfect clarity.

For all of its many good points, however, *LOD* also serves as an unfortunate example of how a fine design can be undermined by lazy development. The cartoonish 16-color artwork may have been adequate three or four years ago, but it's time that Koei overhauled its graphics department and moved into the 1990s. The minimalist-style manual also needs fleshing out: It barely covers the basics, while leaving huge gaps of information for players to fill in for themselves.

But what really tarnishes *LOD's* appeal is that its single scenario runs the full length of the war. At a time scale of two weeks per turn, players are in



for a long, long fight. At the very least, the program should have included the option to pick up the conflict at later stages. And a scenario or two covering individual campaigns such as the Burgoyne-Howe offensive of 1777 would be ideal for newcomers or players looking for a quick contest.

GP



can Revolution. Well, give Koei some credit on this account, for *LOD* does a surprisingly good job of replicating the salient characteristics of the conflict.

In particular, while *LOD* gives due attention to issues of strategy and tactics, the game also places great emphasis on what could be called the politics of command. Unless man-

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